



EYEWITNESS TRAVEL

TOP 10

COSTA BLANCA



- 10 Best beaches
- 10 Historic monasteries & churches
- 10 Spectacular areas of natural beauty
- 10 Prettiest villages
- 10 Most fabulous festivals
- 10 Best hotels for every budget
- 10 Most fun places for children
- 10 Best things to buy & take home
- 10 Liveliest resorts
- 10 Insider tips for every visitor

YOUR GUIDE TO THE 10 BEST OF EVERYTHING

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TOP 10 Costa Blanca Area by Area

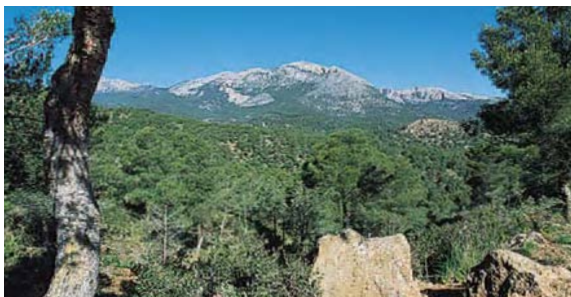
This Top 10 Travel Guide to the Costa Blanca covers not only the Costa Blanca coastline, but also the coastal area to the south, the Costa Cálida, as well as the inland areas of Murcia, Alicante and southern Valencia. The guide divides the whole region into four areas, this map shows their location and extent. Each area is colour-coded; colour bands on the pages covering each one correspond to the colours shown on this map. Almost every place mentioned in the book has a map reference, which takes you to the large maps on the front and back flaps.



The harbour at Cabo de Palos

Inland Murcia pp102-109

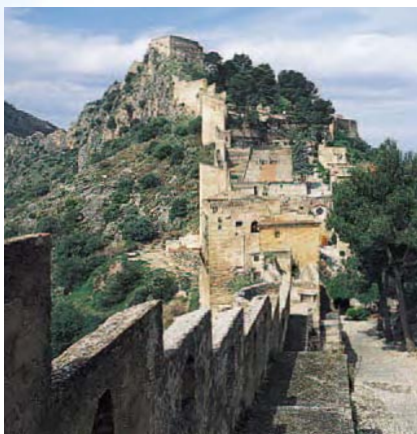
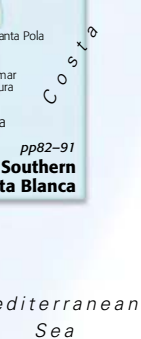




Sierra de Espuña – view from the park entrance

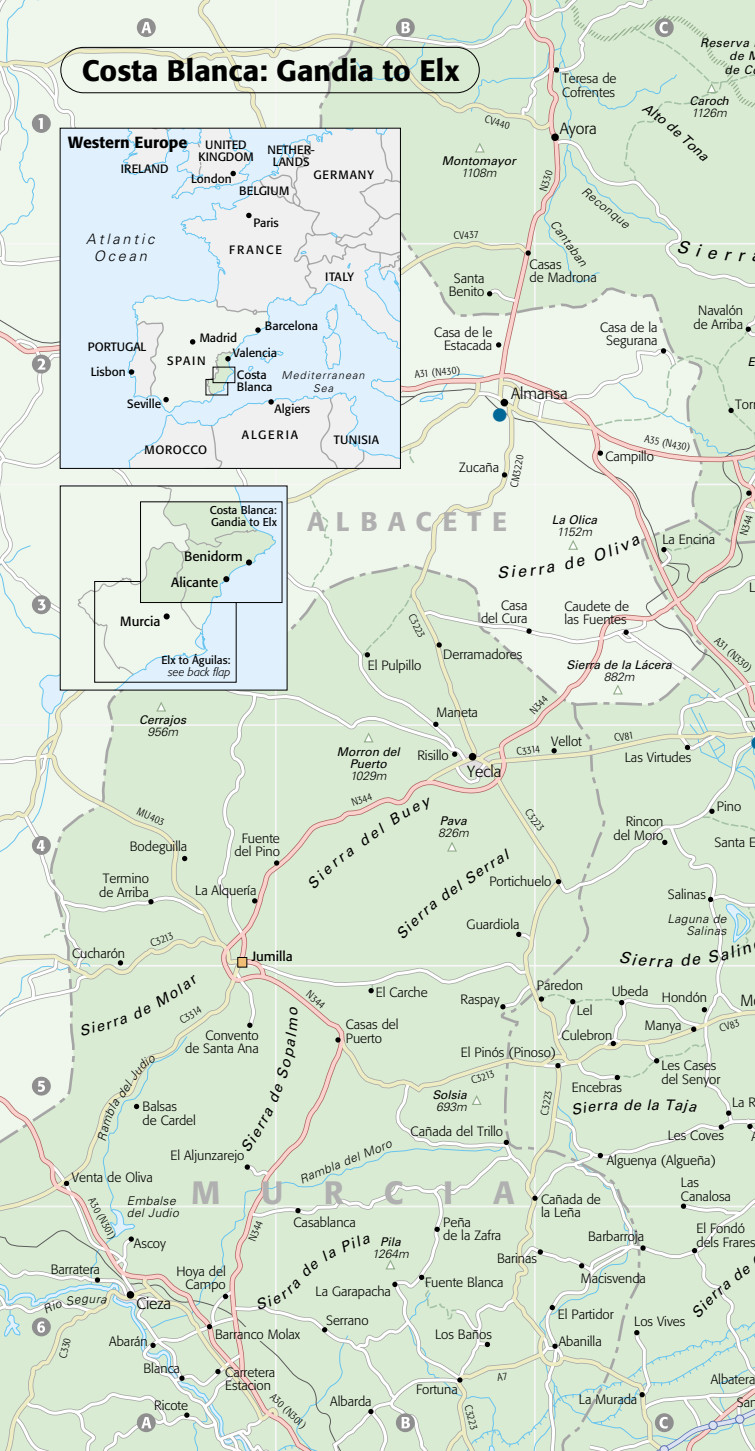


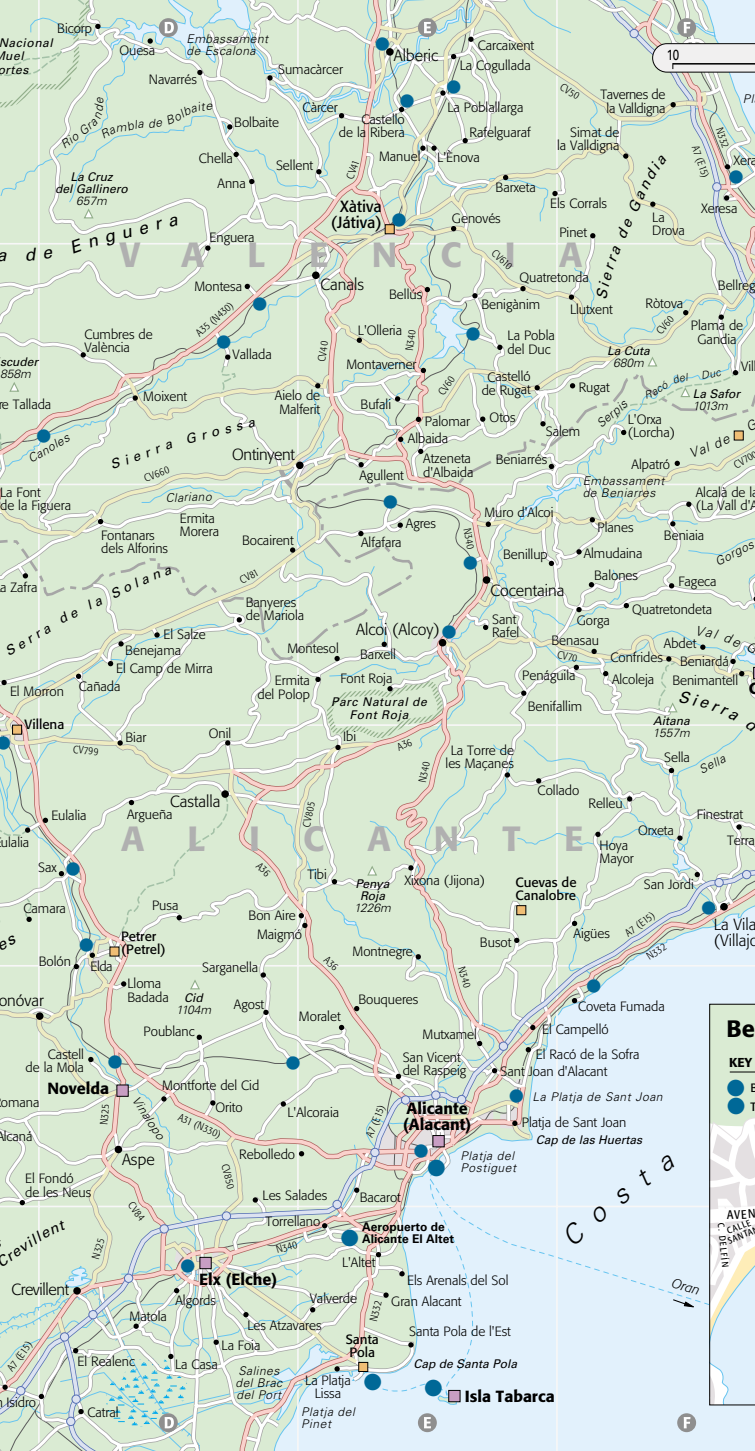
The beach at Santa Pola

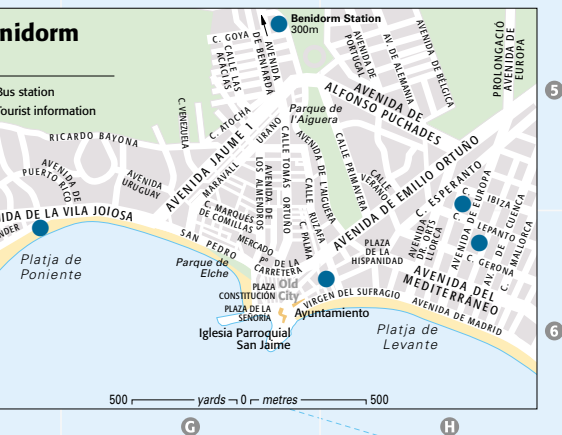


Xàtiva (Játiva) Castle

Costa Blanca: Gandia to Elx







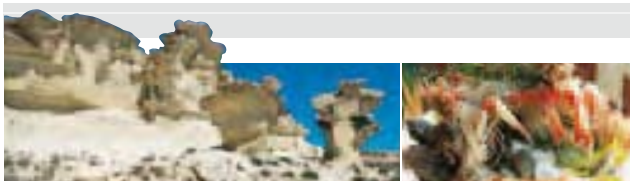
DK EYEWITNESS TOP 10 TRAVEL GUIDES

COSTA BLANCA



MARY-ANN GALLAGHER





Left The "Enchanted City", Playa de Bolnuevo Right A delicious plate of local seafood



LONDON, NEW YORK,
MELBOURNE, MUNICH AND DELHI
www.dk.com

Produced by DP Services,
31 Ceylon Road, London W14 0PY

Reproduced by Colourscan, Singapore
Printed and bound in Italy by Graphicom

First published in Great Britain in 2005
by Dorling Kindersley Limited
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL
A Penguin Company

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A CIP catalogue record is available from
the British Library.

ISBN 1 4053 0866 4

Within each Top 10 list in this book, no
hierarchy of quality or popularity is
implied. All 10 are, in the editor's
opinion, of roughly equal merit.

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The information in this DK Eyewitness Top 10 Travel Guide is checked regularly.

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Left **Galería Dorada, Palau Ducal, Gandia (ceiling detail)** Right **Isla Tabarca**

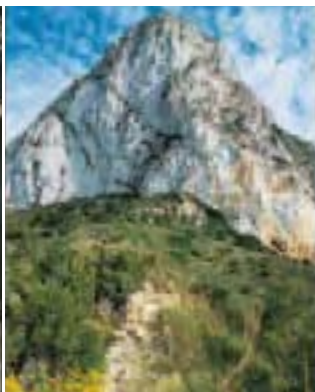
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Left **Catedral de Santa María, Murcia (Puerta del Perdón)** Right **Penyal d'Ifac, Calp**





COSTA BLANCA'S TOP10

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COSTA BLANCA'S TOP 10

TOP 10 Costa Blanca Highlights

Sun, sea and sand are excellent reasons to visit the Costa Blanca, but its attractions don't stop there. Inland, you can explore magnificent Natural Parks, wild sierras and remote hill villages, or visit historic towns with fascinating museums and a wealth of fabulous architecture. The engaging capital cities of Alicante (Alacant) and Murcia are crammed with great shops and tapas bars, and a string of lively resorts along the coast offers splendid beaches, fantastic nightlife and plenty of opportunities for fun. Best of all, there's always a secret cove or rugged cape to be discovered if the crowds get too much.



1 Calblanque

Calblanque is a gorgeous stretch of unspoilt coastline, and one of the Costa Blanca's best-kept secrets. The golden beaches and quiet coves are peaceful even in the height of the tourist season (see pp8–9).



2 Castillo de Santa Bárbara, Alicante

Visible for miles around, Alicante's dramatic castle looms high on a dusty pinnacle. Its sturdy ramparts and watchtowers offer spectacular views over the endless blue of the Mediterranean (see pp10–13).



3 Guadalest

The enchanting hilltop village of Guadalest sits under the romantic ruins of a battered castle, and overlooks a beautiful valley with a deep turquoise lake (see pp14–15).



20 miles 0 km 20



4 Penyal d'Iñac (Peñon d'Iñach)

A designated Natural Park, this extraordinary rock erupts spectacularly from the sea. The views from the summit are breathtaking (see pp16–17).





5 Casa-Museo Modernista, Novelda

Every detail of this Art Nouveau-style town house is exquisite, from the sinuous staircase with its vine-leaf motif to the rainbow-coloured skylights (see pp18–19).



6 Sierra de Espuña

A beautiful stretch of forest and craggy peaks, the Natural Park of Sierra de Espuña offers excellent hiking, a wealth of wildlife, and complete peace (see pp20–21).



7 Hort del Cura, Elx (Elche)

This luxuriant garden, the most beautiful corner of the famous palm groves of Elx, is a tranquil enclave of tropical flowers and cactuses shaded by palm trees (see pp22–3).

8 Isla Tabarca

The tiny island of Tabarca is rimmed with rocky coves and sandy beaches, and the surrounding marine reserve is a paradise for snorkellers and divers (see pp24–5).



9 Palau Ducal, Gandia

This sumptuous Gothic palace, magnificently embellished over the centuries, was home to St Francis of Borja (see pp26–7).

10 Catedral de Santa María, Murcia

Several centuries in the making, Murcia Cathedral is one of the finest Baroque buildings in Spain, with a frilly bell tower, a sumptuous façade and lavishly decorated chapels (see pp28–31).





Top 10 Calblanque

Calblanque, a gorgeous natural paradise near the Mar Menor, is one of the few stretches of Mediterranean coastline to have survived unspoilt – and virtually undiscovered. Thirteen kilometres of quiet coves, sandy beaches and rare fossilized dunes are set against a backdrop of pine forest and craggy hills, criss-crossed with excellent walking trails that offer beautiful panoramas at every turn. Salt lagoons attract a wealth of bird life, while the cliffs and hills are home to several unusual species of flora and fauna.



Local flora

C The only café in the park is a small beach bar with erratic opening hours, so bring plenty of water and picnic supplies, which you can easily find in the nearby resort of La Manga.

C Calblanque is poorly signposted. Take the Cartagena-La Manga motorway, leaving at the Calblanque exit about 1 km (half a mile) after Los Belones; the dirt road leads to the visitor information centre. The beaches have no wheelchair access.

- Map P5
- Visitor information centre (La Jordana): 968 29 84 23. Open 10am–2pm, 3–6pm Tue–Sun
- Information point (Playa Negrete). Opening hours as above
- Free

Top 10 Features

- 1 Beaches
- 2 Dunes
- 3 Coves
- 4 Walks and Rides
- 5 Flora and Fauna
- 6 Bird Life
- 7 Salinas del Rassall
- 8 Old Mines
- 9 Cliffs
- 10 Mountain Peaks

1 Beaches
Calblanque's beaches are the most beautiful in Murcia. Long stretches of golden sand are interspersed with small coves, overlooked by rippling dunes and cliffs. Most popular – yet still uncrowded – are Playa de las Cañas, Playa Calblanque, and Playa Larga (*main image*).

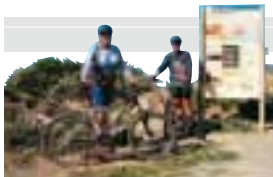


2 Dunes
Wooden walkways traverse Calblanque's fragile dune system (*above*), fossilized over millennia and sculpted by wind and sea into spell-binding shapes. The best back onto Cañas, Larga and Negrete Beaches.



3 Coves
The entire 13 km (8 mile) length of Calblanque's coastline is pocked with dozens of tiny coves, where the turquoise waters are perfect for diving and snorkelling. Even in the height of summer you can pick your way across the rocks to find one all to yourself (*below*).





4 Walks and Rides

The Calblanque Natural Park is covered by a network of walking and mountain-biking trails (*above*) outlined in leaflets available at the park information office.

5 Flora and Fauna

In spring, the hills of Calblanque are carpeted with wild flowers. Among the pine forests are rarer trees, including one of the last surviving cypress groves in Spain. Foxes and badgers are common; you may even spot the endangered *tortuga mora* (sea turtle).



6 Bird Life

Calblanque is particularly rich in bird life. Among the species you may encounter are Bonelli's eagle, the eagle owl, Audoin's gull and the green woodpecker, as well as flamingoes and several varieties of heron and plover.

7 Salinas del Rassall

Still used for commercial salt production, the salt lakes of Rassall are a major nesting area for aquatic resident and migratory birds. The waters contain the brilliantly striped Fartet, an unusual and endangered fish.



Genesis of a Regional Park

The tourist boom of the 1960s and 1970s transformed the once-tranquil region of the Mar Menor into a holiday mecca crammed with high-rise hotels and apartment buildings. In the early 1980s, yet more development was proposed south of La Manga, but the plans appalled local residents. After a protracted battle, the locals triumphed, and the area was finally declared a Regional Park in 1987, becoming one of the last unspoilt enclaves on the whole Mediterranean coast.



8 Old Mines

On the outer fringes of the park you will see the ghostly remnants of abandoned tin, silver and copper mines (*above*).

9 Cliffs

Calblanque's rugged yet ethereal cliffs offer spectacular views along the whole coastline.

10 Mountain Peaks

The mountains of Calblanque rarely rise above 300 m (984 ft), yet they offer breathtaking views across woods and out to sea (*below*).



A section of the GR92, a long-distance walking path, snakes along the entire length of the Calblanque coastline.



Top 10 Castillo de Santa Bárbara, Alicante

Visible for miles around, Alicante's castle looms dramatically above the city. The hill it commands has been inhabited since the Bronze Age, but it was not until the end of the 9th century that the Arabs built the first fortress here. Rebuilt during the 16th and 17th centuries, it was expanded into a mighty garrison during the 18th. You can climb up through a breezy pine forest, pausing in the stunning modern Parque de la Ereta on the way, or take the lazy option and be cranked up 200 m (656 ft) in a lift bored through the rock.



Castle picnic area

2 Within the castle complex, the Kiosko offers an expensive and limited menu of hot dogs, burgers and refreshments.

1 Let the lift take the strain out of getting up to the castle, but stroll back down to enjoy the two lovely parks along the way.

The castle complex has no information office, but maps and leaflets are available within the galleries.

There is wheelchair access to the lift and central square only.

- Mount Benacantil
- Map E5
- 965 26 31 31
- Castle: open Apr–Oct: 10am–8pm daily; Nov–Mar: 9am–7pm daily. Free (return lift ticket: €2.40)

Top 10 Features

- 1 Castle Complex
- 2 Parque de Ingenieros
- 3 Plaza de Cuartel
- 4 La Toreneta
- 5 Cuartel de Ingenieros
- 6 Antigo Taverna/ Cuerpo de Guardia
- 7 Ramparts and Terraces
- 8 Lift
- 9 Parks
- 10 Macho del Castillo

1 Castle Complex

Perched high on the lofty peak of Mount Benacantil, Alicante's castle is straight out of a story book. It's one of the largest surviving castles in Spain, an impressive complex of sturdy stone halls and spacious squares built over 900 years.

2 Parque de Ingenieros

Shaded with palms and scattered with wooden benches, the Parque de Ingenieros (Engineers' Park) is the prettiest and greenest of the castle's squares. The original Arab fortress, long demolished, once stood on this site.



3 Plaza de Cuartel

This wide, sun-bleached expanse at the centre of the fortress is dominated by the massive former barracks building (*cuartel*), which contains a small exhibition on the development of the castle. Nearby, the snack kiosk and picnic area offer fine views.

4 La Toreneta

This battered yet still graceful watchtower (*left*) is poised loftily over the main entrance into the castle. The oldest surviving structure in the whole complex, its base incorporates stones from the original Arab fortress.





5 Cuartel de Ingenieros

One of the largest and most imposing of the castle buildings, the Engineers' Barracks was built in the 18th century, when the fortress was expanded and fortified. Now it makes a magnificent gallery for art exhibitions.



6 Antigo Taverna/ Cuerpo de Guardia

In the 18th century, the castle tavern and the guardroom shared this building – guard duty must have been popular. Now it contains galleries and artists' studios.



7 Ramparts and Terraces

You can stroll along vast sections of the massive fortifications which still encircle the castle. The views are spectacular.



8 Lift

This is no ordinary lift. If you can't face the long, hot climb to the top of the hill, it will swoop you up in seconds in to the heart of the castle. Tunnelled right through the rock, the lift starts from a cave-like entrance opposite the Postiguet Beach below.

9 Parks

The road up to the castle winds its way through the pine-shaded Parque Monte Benacantil. On the southern flank, the award-winning Parque de la Ereta includes a gravity-defying bridge, a water cascade, and a series of glassy, minimalist pavilions.



10 Macho del Castillo

The highest point of the whole complex is the Macho del Castillo, a wide, scrubby square, which offers the most spectacular views of all (*right*). It is still scattered with rusting cannons, which poke threateningly through the fortifications in all directions.

Castle Exhibits

Until recently, the vast halls and squares of the Castillo de Santa Bárbara provided a striking setting for the Capa family's extensive collection of 20th-century Spanish sculpture. The Capa collection is moving to Madrid, and the castle will house a new exhibition of painting, photography and sculpture from the holdings of the Institut Valencià de Art Modern (IVAM), expected to open to the public late in 2005. Information from www.ivam.es



Left La Explanada Centre Iglesia de Santa María Right Alicante's port

TOP 10 Other Sights in Alicante (Alacant)

1 Museo de la Asegurada
This 16th-century granary has been gracefully restored to house a collection of 20th-century fine art. ☎ Plaza de Santa María 3 • Map V2 • 965 14 09 59 • Open 10am–2pm, 4–9 pm Tue–Sat, 10:30am–2:30pm Sun • Free

2 La Explanada
Alicante's famous, palm-lined boulevard is paved with an undulating marble mosaic. A favourite for the evening stroll (or paseo). ☎ Map U3

3 MARQ (Museo Arqueológico Provincial de Alicante)

A hi-tech, hands-on museum with plenty of multimedia gadgets. Educational and hugely entertaining. ☎ Plaza Dr Gómez Ulla s/n • Map V1 • 965 14 90 00 • 10am–7pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun • Adm charge

4 Ayuntamiento
Alicante's town hall is the city's finest Baroque building. ☎ Plaza de Ayuntamiento • Map U2 • 965 14 91 00 • 9am–2pm Mon–Fri • Free



Museo de la Asegurada

5 Barrio de Santa Cruz
Alicante's oldest quarter – a chaotic tumble of whitewashed houses, crooked stairways, and flower-filled balconies. ☎ Map U2

6 Iglesia de Santa María
Alicante's oldest and prettiest church. ☎ Plaza de Santa María • Map V2 • 965 21 60 26 • Open 9am–2pm, 5–8pm daily • Donation of €1 requested

7 Concatedral de San Nicolás
The hulking 17th-century cathedral dominates the old quarter. ☎ C/Labradores • Map U2 • 965 21 26 62 • 7:30am–2.30pm, 5:30–8:30pm daily • Free

8 Lucentum
In Roman times, Lucentum was a sizeable trading centre. All that remains are these evocative ruins on a small mound by the sea. ☎ C/Zeus, Playa de la Albuferata • Map V2 • 965 14 90 00 • www.marq.alicante.com • Open Jun–Sep: 9am–noon, 7–10pm Tue–Sat, 9am–noon Sun; Oct–May: 10am–2pm, 6–8pm Tue–Sat, 9am–noon Sun • Free

9 Alicante Port
Alicante's port is a hive of activity. A brand new entertainment centre has added more shops and a cinema. ☎ Map U3

10 Monasterio de la Santa Faz
There's a popular Easter pilgrimage to this monastery 8 km (5 miles) from the city centre. ☎ Ctra de Valencia • Map V1 • 965 26 49 12 • Open 8am–1pm, 5–8pm daily



Top 10 Other Festivals in Alicante

- 1 Various dates all year: Moros y Cristianos (mock battles)
- 2 Mid-Jan: Porrata de San Antón (traditional fair)
- 3 Feb: Carnavales (Carnival)
- 4 Easter: Semana Santa (Holy Week)
- 5 Thu after Easter Sunday: Peregrinación de la Santa Faz (pilgrimage)
- 6 May: Cruces de Mayo (flower competition)
- 7 Jul, Aug: Fiestas de Verano (music, dance, theatre)
- 8 16 July: Virgen del Carmen (sailor's festival)
- 9 3 Aug: Virgen del Remedio (dedicated to one of Alicante's patron saints)
- 10 6 Dec: Fiesta de San Nicolás (another patron saint of the city)

Las Hogueras de San Juan

The fabulous fiery festival of Las Hogueras (Fogueres in Valenciano), the biggest on the Alicante calendar, culminates on midsummer day, 24 June, the feast day of St John the Baptist. It begins with a bang – literally – on 20 June, with La Mascletà, an ear-splitting barrage of firecrackers. Each neighbourhood vies to create the best hoguera, an enormous figure of wax or papier mâché. On the night itself, they are all paraded through the city streets. After a spectacular firework show, the hogueras are tossed – even the winning entry – onto an enormous bonfire. There are folk parades, medieval markets and firework competitions throughout the week.



The Hogueras

The Hogueras are huge, colourful and incredibly elaborate, and each one can take as long as a year to build – and yet all will go up in flames. Only the model of the winning entry (known as the “Ninot”) does not have to suffer this ignominious fate.



Fireworks display at the Festival of San Juan in Alicante, Spain



Top 10 Guadalest

The tiny village of Guadalest is a spectacular sight, perched precariously on a lofty crag and topped by the ruins of a medieval castle. Its picture-postcard charm draws crowds of day-trippers, yet Guadalest has managed to keep its medieval allure. The upper village is accessed by a tunnel hewn through the rock; beneath is the chaotic sprawl of the old Muslim quarter, with a souk-like string of souvenir shops and cafés. The view from the castle walls at the very summit of the village extends all the way down to the coast.



View of Guadalest

There are plenty of cafés in the Plaza San Gregorio (upper village), but none are remarkable. The best restaurant in the area is Venta la Montaña, in Benimantell, 1 km (half a mile) from Guadalest (Ctra Alcoi 9. 96 588 5141), serving traditional local specialties.

- Map F3
- Tourist office: Avda de Alicante s/n. 965 88 52 98. Open 11am–2pm, 3–7pm Sun–Fri (closed last weekend of each month)
- Casa Orduña: C/Iglesia 2. 965 88 53 93. Open summer: 10:15am–8pm daily; winter: 10:15am–1:45pm, 3:15–8pm daily. Admission: €3 (includes castle entrance)
- Casa Tipica: C/Iglesia 1. 965 88 52 38. Open 10am–9pm (–6pm in winter) Sun–Fri. Free (€2 donation requested)
- Museo Microminiatura: C/Iglesia 5. 965 88 50 62. Open 10am–9pm (–6pm in winter) daily. Admission: €4

Top 10 Features

- 1 Puerta de San José
- 2 Bell Tower
- 3 Castillo de San José
- 4 Casa Orduña
- 5 Cemetery
- 6 Plaza de San Gregorio
- 7 Casa Tipica (Museo Etnológico)
- 8 Museo Microminiatura
- 9 Gifts and Souvenirs
- 10 Embalse de Guadalest

1 Puerta de San José

The entrance (*puerta*) to the upper village is a miniature whitewashed arch leading to a tunnel hollowed out of the rock. Pass through, and you emerge, in fairytale style, onto a cobbled street.

2 Bell Tower

The whitewashed bell tower has become a much-loved symbol of Guadalest (*below*). From high above the village, its sweet, low chimes echo across the valley.



3 Castillo de San José

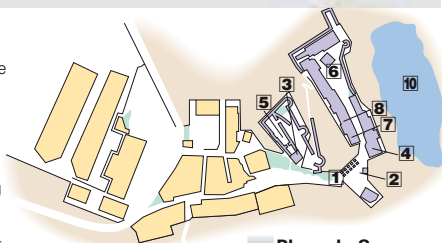
Almost nothing survives of the medieval castle, but the romantic ruins offer superb views of the surrounding countryside. Entrance is via the Casa Orduña, where a stone path culminates in the battered towers of the original fortress.

4 Casa Orduña

The grandest house in Guadalest, this imposing residence, once home to the Orduña family, seems to cling onto the cliff face. It still retains many of its original 18th- and 19th-century furnishings, paintings and *objets d'art*. The upper levels contain an art gallery.



5 Cemetery
High up in the village is a tiny, neglected cemetery – the highest in Spain. It's scattered with a motley collection of limbless statues, and offers more breathtaking views over the valley. A bell-topped archway leads to the remnants of the castle walls.



6 Plaza de San Gregorio

The only street in the upper village leads to the Plaza San Gregorio, with a few shops, a cluster of cafés, and a spectacular viewing point (*mirador*) overlooking the beautiful reservoir below.



7 Casa Típica

Take a glimpse into Guadalest's domestic and agricultural past in this reconstruction of a typical late-19th-century farmhouse complete with tools, costumes, scale models of farm equipment and much more.

8 Museo Microminiatura

Guadalest is stuffed full of quirky museums; the Museo Microminiatura is one of the most curious. Its treasures are viewed through magnifying glasses, and include the Eiffel Tower sculpted on the head of a pin, and Velázquez's famous *Las Meninas* reproduced on a grain of corn.

History of Guadalest

It's hard to imagine quaint little Guadalest as an important military outpost, yet for centuries it was just that. First built by the Arabs around 715, the castle was conquered and expanded by the Christian armies under Jaime I in 1238. Only natural disaster could topple it; during the great earthquake of 1644, the castle foundations were fatally damaged, and when another one hit in 1748, the entire edifice came tumbling down.

9 Gifts and Souvenirs

Guadalest is crammed with gift shops, selling handmade lace, a range of honeys, fiery local spirits, and the usual tat.

10 Embalse de Guadalest

This vast reservoir (*embalse*) provides water for the parched coastal regions. It's also the perfect spot for a picnic (*right*).



Guadalest is a popular coach trip from Benidorm. Get there as early as you can to beat the crowds, and try to avoid it altogether in high season.



Top 10 Penyal d'Ifac (Peñon d'Ifach)

This sheer, impregnable crag dominating the bay of Calp (Calpe) has become the symbol of the Costa Blanca. Once a notorious pirate hideout, it's now a protected Natural Park perfumed with lavender and wild flowers. A steep trail zig-zags upward, burrows through a tunnel cut in the rock, then winds dramatically to a viewing point at the very summit, 332 m (1,089 ft) above sea level. A word of caution: the first section of the trail is suitable for walkers of all levels; after the tunnel, it becomes increasingly tricky.



View from a mirador

There are no cafés on the rock, but picnics are permitted so long as you collect all your rubbish. The nearby port has several cafés.

The number of visitors on the rock is strictly limited, with a maximum of 150 allowed to climb it at one time. In high season, get there early in the day, and try to avoid weekends if you want to avoid the queues.

The information centre is located at the park entrance.

- Calp (Calpe)
- Map G4
- Visitor information centre: C/Il·la de Formentera s/n. 965 97 20 15. www.gva.es
- Open Oct–Apr: 8am–3pm, 4–6pm weekdays, 9am–3pm Sat, Sun; May–Sep: 8am–7pm weekdays, 8am–4pm Sat, Sun
- Free

Top 10 Features

- 1 Hiking Trail
- 2 Tunnel
- 3 Summit of Ifac
- 4 Miradors
- 5 Climbing Routes
- 6 Flora and Fauna
- 7 Birds
- 8 Exhibition
- 9 Coves and Inlets
- 10 Port

1 Hiking Trail

On the lower flanks of the rock, the main trail to the summit twists and turns through gnarled pine trees and swathes of perfumed lavender. On the upper reaches, you'll need a head for heights and sturdy footwear.



2 Tunnel

In 1918, a tunnel was hacked through the rock to make the ascent easier. The floor here is steep and slippery, but at least visitors no longer have to be hauled over the cliff face by ropes, as was the old custom.



3 Summit of Ifac

The narrow hiking trail leads to the very summit of the rock, with stunning views of distant mountain ranges, the coastline and far out to sea.

4 Miradors

There are three viewing points (*miradors*): two are on the lower slopes, but the best views (besides those from the summit) are from the old guard post on the southern flank.





5 Climbing Routes

The Penyal d'Irac is a rock-climbers' mecca. There are several climbing routes on both the north and south faces, which take between five and eleven hours.



6 Flora and Fauna

There are more than 300 species of flora on the scrubby slopes of Irac, including lavender, golden rod, red valerian and St Bernard's lily. The rarest endemic plants are contained in two microreserves. Few animals besides lizards and other reptiles can survive in these rather parched conditions.



7 Birds

The Penyal d'Irac is home to more than 80 species of bird, including Eleanor's falcon, the peregrine falcon, the shag and the northern gannet. There are several species of gull, including the yellow-legged gull and the rarer Audoin's gull.

8 Exhibition

A cluster of buildings at the base of the Penyal d'Irac contains the park information office and two exhibition rooms, which highlight the most important features of the park and describe the wildlife to be found within its borders.

9 Coves and Inlets

The base of the Penyal d'Irac is dotted with picturesque coves, which also have protected status under the Natural Park scheme. A paradise for divers and snorkellers, the crystal-clear waters are home to a wealth of marine life.



10 Port

Calpe's port sits at the neck of the narrow isthmus which joins the Penyal d'Irac with the mainland. It's a cheerful mixture of sleek yachts and battered fishing boats. Cafés and ice-cream parlours aplenty offer welcome refreshment after an exhausting climb.

The Penyal Underwater

The Penyal d'Irac is as fascinating under water as it is above; octopuses and scorpion fish lurk in the shadows, and dive-through tunnels are encrusted with colourful anemones. Several companies in the area offer beginners' diving courses, as well as fantastic dives around the rock itself. These include Club Nautico Les Basetes (Ctra Calpe-Moraira Km 2; 965 83 54 28) and the Pro-Platinum Diving Center (C/Levante 32, Edificio Gran Sol, Calpe; 965 83 40 01).



Top 10 Casa-Museo Modernista, Novelda

Anyone who has seen Gaudí's buildings in Barcelona will love this lavish Art Nouveau-style town house, crammed with swirling woodwork, delicate wrought iron and turn-of-the-20th-century furnishings. It belonged to Antonia Navarro, a young widow with a substantial fortune, and was designed by the celebrated Murcian architect Pedro Cerdán. It fell into disrepair after the Civil War, but a meticulous restoration project has returned the graceful salons to their former glory.



Skylight over stairwell

There is no café within the building, but you can dine on local specialties at the excellent, mid-priced Restaurant L'Alarich, around the corner on the C/San Roque 22 (965 60 75 82; closed Mon–Thu D, Sun).

Fans of Modernista architecture should also visit Novelda's Casino on Avenida Reyes Católicos 75, and the extraordinary St Mary Magdalene's Sanctuary, 3 km (2 miles) from Novelda on the Cerro de la Mola.

- C/Mayor 24, Novelda
- Map D5
- 965 60 02 37
- Open 9am–2pm, 4–7pm Mon–Thu, 9am–2pm, 4–6pm Fri, 11am–2pm Sat (closed Sun, bank holidays, Aug)
- Novelda tourist information office: C/Mayor 6. 965 60 92 28
- Free

Top 10 Features

- 1 Façade
- 2 Study
- 3 Dining Room
- 4 Patio/Courtyard
- 5 Staircase
- 6 Stained-glass Ceilings
- 7 Gallery
- 8 Ballroom
- 9 Bedrooms
- 10 Exhibitions



1 Façade
The façade fuses Classical lines and Modernista details: curvaceous wrought-iron balconies; a profusion of stone fruit and flowers; an intricately carved door flanked with rosy marble panels.

Study
The study is full of exquisitely carved woodwork, from the sculpted leaves on the fireplace to the undulating panelling on the lower walls (right).



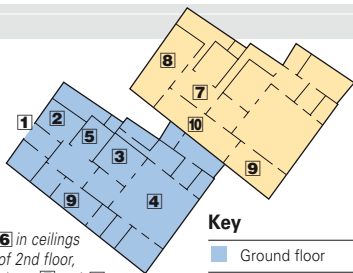
3 Dining Room
This lavish room (above) contains frescoes of languid women in woodland settings, elaborately trimmed doorways, and richly carved furniture.





4 Patio/Courtyard

The delightful, ivy-draped patio is lined with pale sculpted columns supporting delicate arches. Hand-painted tiles depict Antonia Navarro's substantial country estates.



Key

- Ground floor
- 1st floor

6 in ceilings of 2nd floor, above 5 and 7

5 Staircase

The marble staircase curves sinuously upward, an intricate garland of wrought-iron vine tendrils curling between the balusters. Carved wooden panels succeed each other like waves. The bannister culminates in a graceful lamp (below).



6 Stained-glass Ceilings

The entrance hall is flooded with light from a spectacular stained-glass ceiling of multicoloured flowers and leaves. Over the stairwell, a smaller, even more extravagant stained-glass ceiling is surrounded by ceramic flowers and exuberant plasterwork.



7 Gallery

The exceptional woodwork featured throughout the house reaches its apotheosis in the sumptuous wooden gallery which encloses the stairwell. Loops and swirls of burnished walnut are richly carved with intricate detailing.



8 Ballroom

The ballroom is a theatrical whirl of red and gold. The exquisite tiled floor (right) was designed by Catalan architect Domenech i Montaner.

The Modernistas

Modernista architecture is characterized by organic forms, flowing lines and elaborate decoration. It celebrated the traditional crafts of woodcarving, stonemasonry and ceramic tiling, but used them in entirely new ways. The most famous Modernista architect was Gaudí. His spellbinding buildings in Barcelona, now world-famous, influenced many architects in the Costa Blanca region, who incorporated his dazzling use of colour and revolutionary sense of form into their beautiful new mansions and public buildings.

9 Bedrooms

All of the bedrooms have original furnishings. The bathroom adjoining the main bedroom has a huge bath carved from a single slab of marble.

10 Exhibitions

The house has two permanent exhibitions: one of Art Nouveau-style graphic design; the other dedicated to Novelda-born explorer Jorge Juan.



Top 10 Sierra de Espuña

The verdant, pine-clad mountain range of the Sierra de Espuña erupts magically from the parched Murcian plain. A Regional Park since 1995, it's criss-crossed with spectacular walking and mountain-biking trails, with some tougher hikes across the peaks. To the east lie the "bad lands", an unearthly swathe of arid hills and abrupt canyons, which contrast dramatically with the luxuriance of the mountain forests. Scattered across the northern flanks of the Sierra de Espuña are the ancient snow wells, picturesque ruins deep in the pine forest.



View from park entrance

 **Fuente del Hielo, an inexpensive café-restaurant near the visitor information centre, serves good grilled local meat and fish (968 43 92 23; closed Mon, Tue and whole of Aug).**

 **There are three campsites and, for serious hikers, four mountain refuges in the park (see p131). The visitor centre has lists of hotels, pensiones and casas rurales in the region.**

- Map L3
- Visitor information centre (Centro Ricardo Cordonú): Parque Regional Sierra Espuña. 968 43 14 30. www.sierraespuna.com. Open Sep-Jul: 10am-2pm, 3-6pm Tue-Sun; Aug: 8:30am-3:30pm Tue-Sun
- Park refuge booking line: 968 22 88 29.
- Free

Top 10 Features

- 1 Casa Forestal
- 2 Pozos de la Nieve
- 3 Barrancos de Gebas
- 4 Birds
- 5 Peaks
- 6 Flora and Fauna
- 7 Drive
- 8 Walking Trails
- 9 Miradors
- 10 Alhama de Murcia



1 Casa Forestal
This handsomely restored building (above) contains a small but lively exhibition geared toward children, outlining the park's history and the wildlife to be found within its borders. An information desk has maps and leaflets describing walking trails.

Pozos de la Nieve
These strange, circular **2** brick huts were used to store snow, which was packed into ice, and transported by donkey to the towns to make ice cream. They were used from the 16th century right up until the 1920s (right).



3 Barrancos de Gebas
Tacked onto the eastern end of the Sierra Espuña is the strange lunar landscape of the Barrancos de Gebas, known as the "bad lands" (*tierras malas*), where the lushness of the sierra gives way to a startling succession of arid ravines and gullies.





Birds

4 The park is rich in bird life, particularly raptors, among them golden, booted and Bonelli's eagles, eagle and tawny owls, peregrine falcon, Dupont's lark, goshawk and hawk owl.



Peaks

5 Thrusting up through forest, the stony peaks of the Sierra de Espuña (left) are a glorious sight. At 1,583 m (5,194 ft), Espuña is the highest. Pedro López (1,507 m; 4,944 ft) is also magnificent.



Flora and Fauna

6 The indigenous forest has been substantially supplemented by pine. You may well see wild sheep, squirrels, bats and wild boars; mountain cats are less common.

Drive

7 The drive through the park is extraordinary; the road twists up through the Collado Bermejo, offering a staggering panorama of jutting crags and plunging valleys, then down again through flower-strewn woodland to the Casa Forestal.

Miradors

9 Throughout the park there is a series of *miradors* (viewing points) which offer staggering views over peaks, forest and riverbeds. The finest views are from Espuña and the Morrón Chico.

Walking Trails

8 The park is full of excellent walking trails geared toward walkers of all levels. Choose from simple woodland paths suitable for families to tougher hikes across the peaks. The information points provide maps and leaflets on the trails.

Alhama de Murcia

10 Alhama de Murcia is not the most charming town in the area, but it's the easiest access point for the Sierra Espuña, and a good place to buy picnic supplies or find a hotel.

Park Guide

The best way to approach the Sierra Espuña is from Alhama de Murcia, as this road passes the visitors centre, where you can pick up maps and get information on the various walking trails. The snow wells can be found in the northwest section of the park; take the road signposted *pozos de nieve* from the Collado Bermejo viewing point, and walk down the gravel path near the small (unmarked) car park.



Rarer residents of the forest include the Pseudohadana mariana butterfly.



Top 10 Hort del Cura, Elx (Elche)

Elx, a tranquil city at the centre of a vast plain, is surrounded by a glorious palm grove, the finest in Europe, first established by the Phoenicians in the 7th century BC. In the most spectacular corner of this grove is the Hort del Cura (Priest's Garden), with more than 700 palm trees and a blaze of brilliant blooms around a restful pond. First laid out in its current form in the 19th century by Don José Castaño (the priest after whom the garden is named), the garden achieved international fame in the 1940s under Juan Orts Román.



Cactus Garden

☎ There is a kiosk selling drinks and snacks within the garden. For a smart lunch, head to the elegant hotel Huerto del Cura directly opposite the garden (see p124).

🕒 The gardens are small, and best visited early in the morning or late in the evening, when there are fewer crowds. Come out of season if you can, and try to avoid weekends. There is a useful audioguide.

- Porta de la Morera 49
- Map D6, Q1
- 965 45 19 36
- www.huertodelcura.com
- Open 9am–6:30pm daily (–8:30pm in summer)
- Admission €4 (children €1.80); audioguide €1
- Elx tourist information office: Plaza del Parque 3. 965 45 27 47. Open 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2:30pm Sat, 10am–2pm Sun

Top 10 Features

- 1 Imperial Palm
- 2 Date Palms
- 3 Sculptures
- 4 Lily Pond
- 5 Rock Garden and Cactuses
- 6 Bust of Jaime I
- 7 La Casa
- 8 Chapel
- 9 Named Palms
- 10 Flowers

1 Imperial Palm

This magnificent palm (*below*) is almost 200 years old. Named in honour of a visit by the Empress of Austria in 1894, it has seven branches, like a huge candelabra, each weighing around two tonnes.



2 Date Palms

Most of the palms in Elx are date palms. The legend goes that they were brought here by the Phoenicians, who ate the dates on the long sea journey, then planted the stones.



3 Sculptures

The most dramatic sculpture in the park is by Alicante artist Eusebi Sempere – a gently revolving circle of metal spikes that appears to shift shape as it turns (*below*).



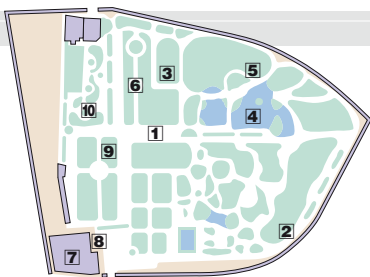
4 Lily Pond

Turtles bask and frogs chatter on the fringes of the pretty lily pond at the heart of the park (*main image*). You can hop across it on a series of stepping stones.



5 Rock Garden and Cactuses

Behind the pond, a tumble of rocks forms a Wild West-style backdrop to the cactus collection. There are tall, spiky varieties as big as trees, many sprouting scarlet fruit and flowers, as well as plump cactuses of the type known as "mother-in-law's cushion".



6 Bust of Jaime I

A small bust of King Jaime I sits at the western end of the park, commemorating the king's decision to save the palm groves of Elx from destruction after the city was taken from the Arabs in 1265.



7 La Casa

The simple house (above) at the entrance to the park was built in 1940, and incorporates palm trunks into its design. It holds administrative offices and isn't open to the public.



8 Chapel

A tiny chapel holds the remains of Juan Orts Román, who remodelled the gardens and ensured that they received international attention. Román was the son of the "Cura" after whom the gardens are named (left).

10 Flowers

The garden is full of strelitzias (below), better known as "birds of paradise" for their spiky forms and extraordinary colours. There's also a brilliant tumble of purple and red bougainvillea at the south-western end.



9 Named Palms

Since 1900, a number of palms have been dedicated to distinguished people, and bear a small plaque. The dedicatees are sent the fruits of the tree during their lifetime.

Elx Palms

About 95 per cent of the palms in Elx are date palms, which produce vast quantities of fruit. While some of the fruit is cultivated and sold, the most economically viable crop to come from the palms is the dried fronds. Elx is the main supplier of fronds to make crosses for use on Palm Sunday. The palm crosses are often kept all year long because they are popularly believed to ward off lightning.



Dedicatees of the garden's palms include pianist Arthur Rubinstein and Nobel Prize-winning scientist Severo Ochoa.

Top 10 Isla Tabarca

Tabarca is the only inhabited island on the Alicante coast. The western end is wild and empty, guarded by an 18th-century watchtower and a remote lighthouse; at the eastern end is the pretty walled village of Nova Tabarca. The port, with a cluster of busy seafood restaurants and cafés, backs onto the island's only sandy beach, which can get very busy in summer, particularly at weekends. The incredibly clear waters which surround the island have been designated a marine reserve and are popular with divers and snorkellers.



South Gate

There are dozens of cafés and restaurants in the port area, offering local specialities like *caldero tabarquino*, a delicious fish stew. Try the mid-range La Almadraba (see p91).

The ferry service from Santa Pola (at least four crossings a day) is faster and more frequent than the one from Alicante (one daily).

A small information booth is open on the island itself during high season. The rest of the year, consult the Santa Pola tourist office.

- Map E6, R1
- Tourist information booth: 676 48 64 27. Open July–Aug: 11am–2pm, 5–7pm daily
- Santa Pola tourist office: C/Astilleros 4. 966 69 62 39

Top 10 Sights

- 1 Casa del Gobernador
- 2 Iglesia de San Pedro y San Pablo
- 3 Lighthouse
- 4 Torre de San José
- 5 Beaches
- 6 Marine Reserve
- 7 Port
- 8 City Walls
- 9 The Islands
- 10 Nova Tabarca



1 Casa del Gobernador

Long since stripped of its original fittings, the 18th-century Governor's House, now a simple hotel (see p127), remains the finest residence on the island.

2 Iglesia de San Pedro y San Pablo

Dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, Tabarca's church, perched right above the sea, is built of faded, rosy stone. Its simple façade has some pretty Baroque flourishes.



3 Lighthouse

Tabarca's lighthouse (below) emerges from the scrubby wilderness at the western tip of the island. It is a substantial 19th-century affair combining sturdy living quarters with a slender tower. Long mechanized, the lighthouse is closed to visitors.





4 Torre de San José

This impressive 18th-century watchtower was built as part of the fortifications which protected the islanders from pirate raids. In the 19th century it was used as a prison.



7 Port

Tabarca's little port is the island's hub, where a few colourfully painted fishing boats are dwarfed by the incoming and outgoing ferries.



8 City Walls

The 18th-century village of Nova Tabarca was fortified to withstand pirate attacks. Stretches of wall and some of the gates survive (above).

9 The Islands

Tabarca is the largest island of a small archipelago. The islets off its coast are perfect for swimming and picnicking.

10 Nova Tabarca

The quiet streets of this simple little settlement of low, brightly painted houses offer delightful glimpses of flower-filled patios and palm-shaded squares.



5 Beaches

The main beach on Tabarca is a silvery arc of sand opposite the port. It attracts huge numbers of sunbathers and swimmers during summer. Thanks to their shingle beaches, the gorgeous coves which fringe the entire island are less popular, so they make great places to escape the crowds.

6 Marine Reserve

The island of Tabarca was declared a marine reserve in 1986. Its waters contain a wealth of aquatic life among the rocks and reefs. A number of companies in Santa Pola offer diving and snorkelling trips.

Pirates, Kings, and Islanders

In 1768, King Carlos III granted sanctuary to a group of largely Genoese prisoners who had been expelled from the original island of Tabarca, a Spanish possession off the coast of Tunisia. A walled town was built for the immigrants, who called their new home Nova Tabarca. This wasn't pure altruism on the King's part; the pirates who had long used the island as a base for coastal raids were forced to find new hideouts when the settlement was built.



Most of the smaller islands off the coast of Tabarca can be reached on foot by scrambling over the rocks – but watch the tides.



Top 10 Palau Ducal, Gandia (Gandía)

This impressive Gothic palace with origins in the late 13th century was acquired by the Dukes of Borja – better known by their Italian name Borgia – in the late 15th. Expanded and embellished over the years, its most sumptuous apartments date from the late 18th century, when lavish Baroque salons dripping with gold leaf were added. Famous for the shimmering ceramic tiles which adorn its walls, galleries and balconies, the palace has been immaculately restored by its current owners, the Jesuits.



Decorative azulejos

The palace has no café. The Santanjordi restaurant nearby offers contemporary Mediterranean fare with an eastern twist, at a medium price (Paseo Germanías 36; 962 87 81 77; closed Sun D, Mon).

Full access to the palace is by guided tour only. Tours are given exclusively in either Spanish or Valencian. It's worth calling in advance to ensure that the multimedia exhibit can be heard in your language.

- C/Duc Alfons el Vell 1
- Map F2
- 962 87 14 65
- www.palauducal.com
- Open 10am–2pm, 5–9pm (winter: 4–8pm) Tue–Sat, 10–2pm Sun. Guided tours at 10:30am, 11:30am, 12:30pm, 5:30pm, 6:30pm, 7:30pm (winter: evening tours at 4:30pm, 5:30pm, 6:30pm)
- Admission €4.50 (children under 12 free)

Top 10 Features

- 1 Main Façade
- 2 Entrance Hall
- 3 Exhibition
- 4 Patio de Armas
- 5 Salón de Águilas
- 6 Galería Dorada
- 7 Mosaic of the Four Elements
- 8 Salón de Coronas
- 9 Chapel
- 10 Oratory

1 Main Façade

The simple stone façade, a sober Gothic portal topped with a faded coat of arms and flanked by narrow windows, gives no hint of the luxury within. Only its scale reveals the grandeur of the family that once lived here.

2 Entrance Hall

Nothing survives of the 13th-century palace but the entrance hall which leads to the central patio. The beamed ceiling is original; its painted decoration has faded over the centuries.



3 Exhibition

The history of the palace and the story of the Borja family are recounted in a fun multimedia exhibition at the beginning of the tour. Note the glowing *azulejos* (tiles) which adorn the walls of the projection room – there are even finer tiles within the palace itself.

4 Patio de Armas

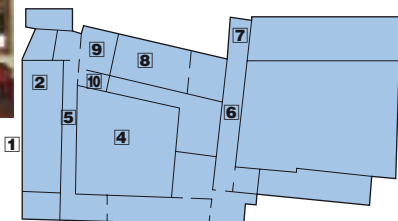
The Patio de Armas (*left*) is the main courtyard of the former palace. Once it would have rung with the clatter of carriages making for the stables at its northeastern corner.





5 Salón de Águilas

This extravagantly decorated 18th-century hall boasts a dazzling gilded frieze of fierce eagles (*águilas*) feasting on clumps of fruit.



1st floor of Palau Ducal (3 on ground floor)



6 Galería Dorada

The sumptuous 18th-century Galería Dorada (left), a succession of apartments opening into one long hall, is a breathtaking whirl of gilded stucco and colourful tiles.



7 The Four Elements

The Galería Dorada culminates in a stunning mosaic representing the four elements; the sun (Fire) is encircled by birds and butterflies (Air), fish and boats (Water), and plants and flowers (Earth).

St Francis of Borja (1510–72)

Francis of Borja was a close advisor to Carlos I of Spain at the time of the queen's death in 1539. Asked to escort her remains for burial in Granada, Francis was so appalled at the sight of her decomposed body that he immediately announced his intention to "follow a master who cannot die" and abandoned the court for a simple religious life. He joined the Jesuits in 1548, and was finally canonized in 1670.



8 Salón de Coronas

The majestic 16th-century Hall of Crowns (left) gets its name from the double-crown symbol which appears on the exquisite Manises tiles with which it is decorated, as well as on its elaborate wooden ceiling.

9 Chapel

A brilliant blue vaulted ceiling scattered with golden stars soars above the Neo-Gothic chapel, created in the room that was formerly St Francis of Borja's office.



10 Oratory

A simple chapel next to the saint's humble bedroom was transformed in the 19th century into this splendidly decorated miniature oratory with a series of murals and an exquisite marquetry floor.



The bed in which St Francis of Borja reputedly slept is in the Salón de Águilas, tucked behind some neo-Gothic arches.



Top 10 Catedral de Santa María, Murcia

The Cathedral of Santa María looms proudly over the centre of Murcia. The finest Baroque building in a city overflowing with Baroque architecture, it also contains some spectacular examples of the Gothic and Renaissance styles. The first stone was laid on the site of a former Arab mosque in 1394, and the first mass was celebrated in the mid-15th century. The richly ornamented façade, with Corinthian columns, stone swoops and curves, and a dazzling array of sculpted saints, was built in the 18th century.



The spectacular 19th-century organ, seen from the Choir.

1 A short walk from the cathedral, Los Zagales (C/Polo de Medina 4; 968 21 55 79) is a great place for tapas, with a crowd of locals permanently propping up the bar. The walls are covered with photos of famous footballers and bullfighters.

2 Bring some €1 coins to illuminate the highlights of the cathedral interior, including the Choir, the Capilla de los Vélez and the Capilla del Junterón.

- Plaza del Cardenal Belluga
- Map U6, N3
- 968 21 63 44
- Open: 7am–1pm, 6–8pm (winter: 5–8pm) daily
- Free

Top 10 Features

- 1 Baroque Façade
- 2 Puerta de los Apóstoles
- 3 Puerta del Perdón
- 4 Coro
- 5 Capilla de los Vélez
- 6 Capilla del Junterón
- 7 Puerta de la Sacristía
- 8 Altar Mayor
- 9 Museo Catedralico
- 10 Bell Tower

1 Baroque Façade
The spectacular main façade (right), with its ranks of Corinthian columns and lavishly carved stonework, was built from 1739–54 by architect Jaime Bort. It overlooks the lovely Plaza del Cardenal Belluga.



2 Puerta de los Apóstoles

The elaborate Gothic portal on the southern side of the cathedral (above) is set in a sea of sculpture, including images of the four apostles and a cloud of angelic musicians. Queen Isabella's coat of arms crowns the portal – she gave generously toward the cathedral's construction.



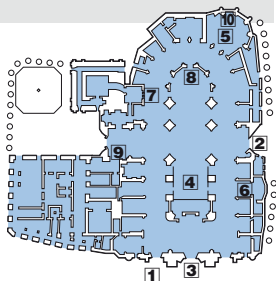
3 Puerta del Perdón
Surmounted by an exquisite sculpture of the Virgin Mary with angels, the central doorway of the main façade was once reserved for royalty.

4 Coro
The sumptuous stalls in the Gothic choir (below) are densely carved with biblical scenes.



5 Capilla de los Vélez

The jewel of the cathedral is the Capilla de los Vélez, the magnificent late 15th-century burial place of the powerful Marquises of Vélez. Look out for the “noble savages” – a fashionable motif after Columbus’s voyage to the Americas.



6 Capilla del Junterón

This dazzling chapel (another aristocratic burial place) is the grandest expression of Renaissance architecture in Murcia. Adorned with graceful saints and Classical figures, it contains a shimmering 16th-century altarpiece topped by a beautiful relief.

7 Puerta de la Sacristía

Baroque at its most flamboyant, this extravagant doorway is in the form of a splendid triumphal arch, with columns and pedestals supporting a host of cherubs surmounted by the three Virtues.

The Bell Tower

Work started on the cathedral bell tower in 1519, but it was not completed until 1793. Each of its five levels is in a different style. Beginning with a theatrically Gothic section complete with swarms of fabulous creatures, the tower ascends to a winsome Baroque lantern right at the very top. You could once get a close-up look at the changing architectural styles by climbing the belltower, but, sadly, it is now closed to visitors.



8 Altar Mayor

The vast main altarpiece (*left*) forms a golden wall behind the main altar. Two exquisite dragons protrude from the centre of the grille.



9 Museo Catedralico

The newly expanded cathedral museum houses paintings, sculpture and ceremonial objects, including an extraordinary Baroque silver monstrance.

10 Bell Tower

The delightful bell tower, with its Baroque frills and flounces, is an oddly harmonious mish-mash of styles (*right*).



In the cathedral museum, look out for a haunting 14th-century altarpiece and an extraordinary solid silver Baroque monstrance.



Left Plazas Las Flores and Catalina Centre Casino de Murcia Right Museo Salzillo

TOP 10 Other Sights in Murcia

1 Casino de Murcia

Murcia's Modernista casino is a hotchpotch of styles, with an Arabic vestibule, a Rococo ballroom, and a Neo-Classical salon dotted with sculptures.

☎ *C/Trapería 18 • Map U5 • 968 21 22 55*
• 10am–9pm daily • Adm charge

2 Museo Salzillo

A museum devoted to the work of Francisco Salzillo (see p54). ☎ *Plaza San Agustín 3 • Map S5 • 968 29 18 93* • Open summer: 10am–2pm, 5–8 pm Tue–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat; winter: 10am–2pm, 5–8 pm Tue–Thu, 11am–2pm Sun • Adm charge

3 Museo de la Ciencia y el Agua

A delightful, fun-filled museum, with interactive exhibits, models and even a tiny planetarium. ☎ *Plaza de la Ciencia 1 • Map T6 • 968 21 19 98* • Open summer: 10am–2pm, 5–8pm Mon–Fri; winter: 10am–1pm, 4–8pm Tue–Fri, 10am–2pm, 5–8pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun • www.cienciayagua.org • Adm charge

4 Iglesia de la Merced

The graceful former Convent of Mercy is now part of the university complex. ☎ *C/Santo Cristo 2 • Map U5* • Open for Mass only



Museo Hidráulico Los Molinos

5 Museo de Bellas Artes

There are almost 1,000 paintings on display at the Fine Arts Museum, mainly by Murcian artists. ☎ *C/Obsipo Frutos 12 • Map V5*
• 968 23 93 46 • 9am–2pm, 5–8pm Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm Sat • Free

6 Museo Hidráulico Los Molinos de la Río Segura

A fascinating museum dedicated to the watermills that once lined the River Segura. ☎ *C/Molinos 1 • Map T6 • 968 35 86 00* • www.molinosdelrio.org • Open 10am–2pm, 5–8pm Mon–Sat (mornings only in summer) • Free

7 Plazas Las Flores and Catalina

The prettiest and liveliest of all Murcia's café-squares. ☎ *Map T5*

8 Teatre Romea

Murcia's most important venue for the performing arts. ☎ *Plaza Julián Romea s/n • Map T5 • 968 35 53 90* • www.teatroromea.org

9 Mercado de las Verónicas

There's nowhere better to appreciate the wealth and variety of Murcian produce than this lively covered market. ☎ *Map T6*

10 Santuario de Nuestra Señora de la Fuensanta

High on a steep crag jutting abruptly from the plain, this 16th-century sanctuary is dedicated to the patron saint of Murcia. It's topped with an enormous statue, visible for miles. ☎ *La Alberca (5km from Murcia) • Map V6 • 968 84 22 01*

Top 10 Famous Murcians

- 1 Ben Arabí (1164–1240)
– philosopher
- 2 Diego Saavedra Fajardo (1584–1648) – diplomat and politician
- 3 José Moñino Redondo, Count of Floridablanca (1728–1808) – politician and intellectual
- 4 Julián Romea (1813–1868) – actor
- 5 Isaac Peral (1851–1895)
– submarine inventor
- 6 Vicente Medina Tomás (1866–1937) – writer and poet
- 7 Juan de la Cierva (1895–1936) – inventor of the *autogiro*, an early helicopter
- 8 Carmen Conde (1907–1996) – poet, novelist and essayist
- 9 Narciso Yepes (1927–1997) – classical guitarist
- 10 Paco Rabal (1926–2001)
– film star

Francisco Salzillo (1707–1783)

The Baroque sculptor Francisco Salzillo is Murcia's favourite son. He took naturalism to new heights with his emotionally charged sculptures. Every detail – from frown lines to fingernails – is meticulously carved, creating extraordinarily lifelike figures. Salzillo's fame spread rapidly during his lifetime, but he hated travelling and refused all invitations to court, never leaving Murcia if he could help it. His most celebrated works adorn the elaborate pasos (floats) still used in Murcia's Holy Week processions.



El Prendimiento (The Arrest), 1765

Part of a larger sculptural group, Salzillo's depiction of Judas's betrayal of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane is extremely powerful. The two figures are carved from a single piece of wood.



Salzillo float during a Holy Week procession







Left *The Fall of Granada* by C. L. Ribera y Fieve Right Jaime II of Aragon (19th-century etching)

TOP 10 Moments in History

1 c.50000 BC–c.1000 BC: Prehistory

The Costa Blanca has been inhabited since Paleolithic times, with cave dwellers living in the inland hills from around 50000 BC. Iberian settlements began to appear around 3000 BC. Later, two Bronze Age cultures emerged: Argaric in the south and Valencian in the north.

2 c.1000 BC–c.200BC: Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians

By 1000 BC, the Phoenicians and the Greeks were establishing trading settlements along the coast. The Carthaginians, landless after their defeat in the First Punic War, established Cartago Nova (modern Cartagena) in the 3rd century BC.

3 c.200 BC–c. AD 400: Romans

Rome crushed Carthage in the Second Punic War, marking the beginning of Roman domination of the Iberian Peninsula. The Romans brought with them their

laws, their language and their roads, and established important settlements at Denia (Dénia), Alicante (Alacant) and Cartagena.

4 c.400–711: Visigoths

By the middle of the 4th century AD, the Roman Empire had splintered, and the Iberian Peninsula was invaded by a succession of northern tribes. The Visigoths arrived in 411 and eventually took control of most of Spain, but dynastic disputes left them ripe for conquest by the next wave of invaders.

5 711–c.1200: Arabs

In 711, the first Berber armies invaded the Iberian Peninsula, conquering most of it within a decade. Renamed Al-Andalus, it was ruled first by a mighty caliphate and then as a series of smaller kingdoms (*taifas*). Arabic irrigation techniques created the fertile orchards which still characterize the Costa Blanca.

6 c.1200–c.1300: The Reconquista

Pockets of northern Spain remained resistant to the Arab armies, and it was from here that the Christian Reconquest was launched. Battles raged through much of the 13th century. Mursiya (Murcia) was taken by Jaime I of Aragón in 1266; Al Lekant (Alicante) fell to Jaime II in 1296.



Ruined Roman theatre, Cartagena

7 1244–c.1700: The Kingdom of Valencia

After the Reconquest, Jaime I re-established the Kingdom of Valencia, with special privileges, including the right to a separate court and their own currency. These ancient rights were only withdrawn after the Kingdom backed the losing side in the War of the Succession (1700–1714).

8 1244–c.1700: Murcia on the Frontier

In 1244, Murcia, strategically located on the border with the Arabic kingdom of Granada, became a vassal state of the powerful Kingdom of Castile, which annexed it outright in 1266. When Granada fell in 1492, Muslim converts (*Moriscos*) flooded into Murcia. Their expulsion in the early 17th century caused economic crisis.

9 The Lost Years (1700–1939)

Spain suffered during the wars and political upheavals of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, much of the region's most spectacular architecture was built during intermittent periods of prosperity. Simmering unrest in the early years of the 20th century erupted into the bloody Civil War (1936–9), won by General Franco.

10 Since 1939

Regional differences – including the Valencian language – were savagely suppressed under Franco's dictatorship. The advent of mass tourism in the 1960s brought jobs, money and a swathe of new development. Franco died in 1975, and democracy was peacefully restored. Tourism continues to provide the Costa Blanca with most of its wealth.

Top 10 Historical Figures

1 Dama de Elx (4th century BC)

Historical or mythical? – no-one knows. The origins of this exquisite Iberian sculpture are shrouded in mystery (see p83).

2 Hannibal Barca (c.247–c.183 BC)

The Carthaginian general who famously crossed the Alps with elephants.

3 Abd al-Rahman II (790–852)

Abderramán II founded the city of Mursiya (Murcia) in 825.

4 El Cid (1043–99)

This charismatic knight won considerable lands around Valencia from the Arabs.

5 Jaime I (1208–76)

The first to make major gains against the Arabs in the Costa Blanca.

6 Isabella I (1451–1504) and Ferdinand V (1452–1516)

The Catholic monarchs held court at Orihuela in 1488, with the city at its most influential.

7 Rodrigo de Borgia (c.1431–1503)

The infamous Pope Alexander VI, father of 10 children including Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia, was born in Xàtiva.

8 Barbarroja (d.1546)

Turkish pirate Jayr al-Din – better known as Barbarroja ("Red Beard") – was the scourge of the Mediterranean.

9 José de Ribera (1591–1652)

One of Spain's finest painters, he was born in Xàtiva but spent most of his life in Italy.

10 José Moñino Redondo (1728–1808)

A key figure in the Spanish Enlightenment. Born in Murcia.



Left **Sierra de Espuña** Right **Isla Tabarca**

TOP 10 Areas of Natural Beauty

1 Cap de la Nau (Cabo de la Nao)

This is the epitome of the Costa Blanca: a rugged cape with tiny, magical coves, many accessible only by boat, and sheer cliffs offering magnificent views along the whole coastline. While parts are covered with villas, there are still some beautiful undisturbed corners to explore. 📍 *Map H3*

2 Parc Natural del Montgó
The pale massif of Montgó looms high above the seaside resorts of Denia (Dénia) and Xàbia (Jávea). Delightful walking trails meander through flower-strewn scrub and woodland, past ancient caves and up to stunning viewpoints that gaze out across the sierra and over the sea. 📍 *Map H2*

3 Penyal d'Irac, Calp (Calpe)
A vast, sheer rock erupting from the turquoise sea, the Penyal d'Irac is a startling sight.

**Penyal d'Irac (Peñon d'Irac)**

Once a virtually impregnable pirate lair, it is now a Natural Park with a magnificent walking trail that, if you have the stamina for it, will lead you right to the summit (*see pp16–17*).

4 Fonts d'Algar
Tucked away in an orchard-lined valley, these enchanting waterfalls spill down the hillside and form a series of delightful natural swimming pools. A wooden staircase eases the ascent across boulders and rushing streams to the highest pool, which is shaded by willow trees and makes a perfect picnic spot (*see p73*).

5 Parc Natural de la Font Roja
One of the few surviving stretches of indigenous Mediterranean oak forest, this glorious expanse of woodland is a cool, shady Natural Park scattered with ancient snow wells (used to collect ice in the days before refrigeration) and criss-crossed with beautiful walking trails offering spectacular views of endless mountains. 📍 *Map E3*

6 Isla de Benidorm
The natural beauty of this curious, triangular island in the middle of Benidorm Bay is best appreciated underwater, for the Isla de Benidorm is a marine reserve and home to a fabulous array of sea life, from sea anemones to octopus, stingray and scorpion fish. 📍 *Map G4*



7 Isla Tabarca

Tabarca, the only inhabited island on the Costa Blanca, has beautiful pebbly coves, a sandy bay, and a charming old town complete with a winsome little church right on the water's edge (see pp24–5).

8 Sierra de Espuña

This magnificent range of pine-clad mountains is one of the few green corners of arid Murcia. Wonderful walking trails offer startling glimpses of forested slopes and rocky outcrops, and birds of prey wheel lazily, high above the treetops (see pp20–21).



Fonts d'Algar

9 Calblanque

The Regional Park of Calblanque is one of Murcia's best-kept secrets. Just a few minutes' drive from the resorts of the Mar Menor, this stunning stretch of unspoilt coastline boasts hidden coves and gorgeous sandy beaches with perfectly clear waters (see pp8–9).

10 Ciudad Encantada de Bolnuevo, Bolnuevo

The pale stone cliffs behind Bolnuevo Beach have been shaped over time into an extraordinary "enchanted city"; it doesn't take much to see towers and castles in the creamy swirls of rock, some of which are poised on impossibly thin pedestals (see p94).

Top 10 Trees, Plants and Wildlife

1 Holm Oak

With its dark, waxy leaves this evergreen is common across the Iberian Peninsula.

2 Spanish Broom

This hardy evergreen is a beautiful sight in spring, when its glorious yellow blooms carpet the countryside.

3 Valencian Rock Violet

This pretty, purple, cliff-dwelling flower thrives in damp, salty conditions.

4 Fruit Trees

The orchards of the Costa Blanca produce almonds, citrus fruit and cherries.

5 Wild Herbs

Rosemary, thyme and lavender scent the scrubby slopes, particularly around the Montgó Natural Park.

6 Gulls

Many species of gull breed along the Costa Blanca, including the endangered Audouin's gull, with its trademark red bill and dark feet.

7 Birds of Prey

Eagles, hawks and vultures wheel silently above the more remote sierras of the northern Costa Blanca.

8 Flamingoes

During the summer months, flamingoes come to breed on the salt lakes at Torrevieja and the Mar Menor.

9 Ibex

This nimble mountain goat once faced extinction, but is now flourishing in the sierras of the northern Costa Blanca and parts of Murcia.

10 Wild Boar

These tusked, shaggy-coated mammals are common in most of the forested inland regions of the Costa Blanca.



Left **Denia** Right **Torre Vieja****TOP 10 Resorts**

1 Denia (Dénia)
Dénia, now a relaxed family resort with great beaches and a busy port, had a long and glorious history before tourism hit the Mediterranean coast – first as a Roman settlement, then as the capital of an Arabic kingdom. For respite from the summer crowds, take a hike in the nearby Montgó Natural Park. 📍 *Map H2*

2 Xàbia (Jávea)
The pretty tumble of old Xàbia sits on a hilltop a couple of miles inland from the sea. The bay forms a perfect horseshoe, with a choice of pebbly or sandy beaches and a spectacular cape at both ends. 📍 *Map H3*

3 Calp (Calpe)
Calp has a stunning natural setting on a vast bay dominated by the Penyal d'Iñac (see pp16–17, 36). The modern resort has almost swallowed up the original medieval village, but its sandy beaches and excellent water-sports facilities have made it immensely popular. 📍 *Map G3*

4 Altea
Pretty Altea, piled on a hill overlooking the sea and topped with a blue-domed church, has long attracted artists, and the old quarter is packed with arty shops and galleries. A narrow, pebbly beach is backed by an appealing seafront promenade, where the whole town comes to stroll on summer evenings. 📍 *Map G4*

5 Benidorm
The biggest and best-known of the Costa Blanca resorts, Benidorm is a mini-Manhattan of skyscrapers set around an impressive bay. Its immaculate beaches, two sweeping curves of golden sand, are the finest in the region, and the choice of restaurants and nightlife can't be beaten. 📍 *Map G4*

6 La Vila Joiosa (Villajoyosa)
The Jewelled Town gets its name from the brightly painted houses of ochre, yellow and blue which are clustered around the port. It has fine sandy beaches, a smattering of historic buildings, and a centuries-old chocolate-making tradition. 📍 *Map F4*

7 Torre Vieja
Torre Vieja is a low-key family resort with some great sandy beaches and an unusual but attractive seafront, with rock

**Altea**



La Vila Joiosa

pools accessed by ladders. The salt lagoons on the outskirts have been designated a Natural Park; you might well spot a cloud of pink flamingoes here. Map Q3

8 Santiago de la Ribera
A smart, upmarket resort on the shores of the Mar Menor, Santiago de la Ribera is popular with well-heeled Murcianos. The quiet waters of the inland sea make it the perfect place to learn to sail or windsurf, and the watersports facilities are excellent. Map P4

9 Puerto de Mazarrón
This sprawling family resort has several sandy beaches spread on either side of a rocky headland, which has an attractive coastal path. The inland village of Mazarrón is a tranquil spot for a break from the beach. Map M5

10 Águilas
Águilas is beautifully set on a curving bay against a backdrop of distant mountains. There are some handsome 19th-century squares, a dramatic castle high on a cliff above the fishing port, and dozens of secluded coves on the outskirts. Development has been largely low-key. Map L6

Top 10 Quiet Resorts

1 Oliva
Escape the crowds in this peaceful village, 4km (2 miles) from lengthy golden beaches.

2 Moraira
A smart enclave of whitewashed villas on a rugged coastline, with quiet coves and a marina.

3 El Campelló
Despite the proximity of the busy beaches at San Juan, this fishing village retains its tranquil atmosphere.

4 Guardamar del Segura
This is a small, family resort blessed with wonderful, wild dune-backed beaches.

5 Dehesa de Campoamor
A modern resort of low-rise villas and apartments set around long, golden sands.

6 Lo Pagán
The smallest resort on the Mar Menor, Lo Pagán has great seafood restaurants on the beach.

7 Portús
This tiny village overlooks a narrow, sandy beach with colourful fishing boats. Its relative seclusion makes it popular with naturists.

8 Bolnuevo
On the fringes of Puerto de Mazarrón, Bolnuevo has long sandy beaches and hidden coves to the south.

9 La Azohía
On the unspoilt cape of Tiñoso, this fishing village is one of the quietest resorts in the region.

10 Calabardina
A charming little resort tucked under a dramatic headland and overlooking a delightful bay.



Left **The Calblanque coastline** Right **The beach at Benidorm****TOP 10 Beaches****1 Playa de Venecia, Gandia-Playa**

This immaculate golden beach is famously “combed” by tractors in summer to maintain its pristine appearance. Lined with smart rows of coconut-matting sunshades and blue-and-white-striped sun loungers, it has all the amenities: play areas for children, showers, lifeguard posts, and a line of restaurants and cafés along the seafront. 📍 *Map F1*

2 Les Aigües Blanques, Oliva

Oliva is blessed with long, sandy beaches that extend for miles so that you can always find a quiet spot if you are prepared to walk. This beach is the largest and best equipped, with every imaginable amenity. 📍 *Map G2*

3 Les Rotes, Denia (Dénia)

This is a delightful pebbly stretch of rock pools, tiny islands and hidden coves, where you can usually find a quiet corner. It has good amenities and a breezy seafront promenade lined with restaurants and cafés. 📍 *Map H2*

4 La Granadella, Cap de la Nau (Cabo de la Nao)

The only way in and out of this tiny, pebbly cove is a narrow road which twists and turns down to the perfect curve of the bay. The blue-green water is overlooked by cliffs, and the small rocky beach is backed by just a couple of café-bars. 📍 *Map H3*

**La Granadella****5 Portitxol, Cap de la Nau**

This is another exquisite cove, flanked by high cliffs and looking out over the tiny island of Portitxol. The viewing point (*mirador*) above the cove offers some of the most beautiful views on the whole coastline. Amenities include a handful of café-bars and a lifeguard post. 📍 *Map H3*

6 Playa de Poniente and Playa de Levante, Benidorm

The golden arc of Benidorm's twin beaches stretches for almost five km (3 miles) around the bay, a breathtaking sweep of gleaming sand and turquoise waters. In high season, you'll need to get there early to grab some space. Immaculate and superbly equipped with everything from play areas and wheelchair ramps to beach bars and lifeguard posts. 📍 *Map F4, G4*



7 Playa de San Juan, Alicante (Alacant)

Easily the best of Alicante's beaches, this glorious stretch of fine sand with every facility is in a popular holiday suburb a short tram ride from the city centre. The bars and clubs buzz all night in summer. Map E5

8 Dunas del Guardamar, Guardamar del Segura

These wild, gorgeous, windswept dunes are rarely crowded, even in the height of summer. The dunes are part of a natural reserve backed by a pine forest with walking trails and picnic spots. There are a few snack bars, but little else. Map Q2

9 Calblanque

Calblanque (see pp8–9) is the most beautiful stretch of coastline on the Costa Blanca, with golden beaches, secluded coves, cliff walks and forested hills. It has few facilities, so bring picnic things and plenty of water. Take care: the current can be dangerous. Map P5

10 Playa de Bolnuevo, Bolnuevo

The main beach of this sleepy little resort is long and sandy, with good facilities including lifeguards, cafés and restaurants. Behind it are the extraordinary cliffs of the "Enchanted City" (see p94). To the south, naturists will find a series of secluded coves. Map M5



Playa de Bolnuevo

Top 10 Beach Survival Tips

1 Blue Flags

Blue Flags are awarded to beaches which have achieved a high standard of cleanliness and offer good facilities.

2 Warning Flags

Don't swim if a red flag is flying, and be cautious if you see a yellow flag. A green flag means it is safe to swim.

3 Facilities

Town beaches generally offer excellent facilities, including play areas, showers and refreshments.

4 Jellyfish

Jellyfish can be a nuisance. If you get stung, larger beaches will have a medical post.

5 Lifeguards

Most beaches, even more remote ones, will have a lifeguard post in summer.

6 Sunscreen

Don't forget your sunscreen! The sun is very fierce on the Costa Blanca. You should avoid sunbathing between noon and 4pm.

7 Water

Ensure you bring an adequate water supply, particularly when staying on remote beaches.

8 Beach bars

Many beaches have snack bars, or *xiringuitos*, which open only in the summer.

9 Beating the crowds

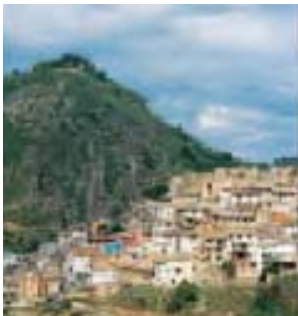
The Costa Blanca is highly developed, and city beaches are always crammed, but you can always find a quiet corner.

10 Wheelchair Access

Many beaches, particularly those in the cities, have special ramps for wheelchair access. The tourist office will have details.



Beach is 'playa' in Spanish, 'platja' in Valencian – you may come across either, depending on which part of the coast you are on.

Left **Val de Segura** Right **Denia to Granadella: view from the coast road****TOP 10 Walks and Drives****Planes (Val de Gallinera drive)****1 Val de Gallinera (Drive)**

If you can, visit the Val de Gallinera in spring, when the scent of almond blossom fills the air, and the hillsides are covered with a sea of pink and white. The C-3311 from Pego to Planes is a scenic mountain road, winding past medieval villages, ghostly Arabic settlements, lush orchards and ruined castles. To extend the drive, head for the lovely village of Agres (see p46). Map G2-F3

2 Val de Segura (Drive)

This drive follows the Segura River from the cosmopolitan city of Murcia to the country town of Calasparra (see p104). Along the way, take time out at Archena's pretty spa (good for lunch and a dip in the pool), then meander through the green valley of Ricote up to historic Cieza, past the lake of Alfonso XIII, which attracts many birds, finishing up among the rice fields of Calasparra.

Map N3-K1

3 Montgó (Hike)

The hike to the top of Montgó begins at the entrance to the park and climbs steadily, past ancient caves and scrubby hills covered with wild herbs and flowers, up to the Creueta de Cima at 753 m (2,470 ft). The hike is easy, but it takes about three hours each way – well worth it, though, since a tremendous view of the dramatic coastline unfolds. Map H2

4 Val de Guadalest (Drive)

From the seaside resort of Altea to the hilltop village of Penáguila, this drive takes in waterfalls and natural pools near Callosa d'en Sarrià (Fonts d'Algar, see pp36, 73), the precipitous village of Guadalest overlooking a turquoise lake (see pp14-15), and, approached through olive groves and rugged passes, the serene, castle-topped village of Penáguila. Map G4-E3

**Val de Guadalest**

5 Racó del Duc (Walk)

An abandoned railway line has been converted into an excellent walking and cycling path which follows the River Serpis over bridges and through tunnels, past gorges, waterfalls, ruined castles and woodland glades, from Villalonga to L'Orxa. It's an easy trail which takes about three to four hours to walk. Bring a picnic and a swimming costume. Map F2

6 Sierra de Bernia (Hike)

There are several hikes from the Fonts d'Algar; a short walk from the falls will bring you to the substantial ruins of the Fortress of Bernia, where experienced walkers can continue on to the demanding circuit around the peak itself. The hike requires some simple climbing moves and takes about seven hours. Map G3



Sierra Espuña

7 Sierra de Espuña (Hikes)

The Sierra de Espuña is probably the best place for walking in the Costa Blanca, with a range of trails adapted to hikers of all abilities. There are short trails for families, and more demanding hikes for advanced walkers (see pp20–21). Map L3

8 Parc Natural de la Font Roja (Walk)

The sanctuary and spa at the heart of the Parc Natural de la Font Roja are popular weekend day trips for locals. The shady

walking paths through Mediterranean oak forest are the perfect respite from searing summer heat. There are walking trails to suit hikers of all levels, with the easiest (suitable for families) leaving from the sanctuary itself. Map E3

9 Wine country: Monóvar, Jumilla, Yecla (Drive)

Take a tour of the *bodegas* in the delightful wine towns of Monóvar, Jumilla and Yecla (see p56). Lost in a sea of vines, this drive is at its best in the late summer or early autumn just before harvest. Begin at sleepy Monóvar and finish in Yecla, the largest and prettiest of the three. Map C5–B4

10 Coast Road, Denia (Dénia) to Granadella (Drive)

This scenic coastal drive twists over scrubby hills past the Natural Park of Montgó, through the whitewashed village of Xàbia (Jávea), around the dramatic headland of the Cap de la Nau (Cabo de la Nao), to the tiny cove of Granadella. It's one to avoid in high summer, though. Map H2–3





Left **Sailing on the Mar Menor** Right **Diving off Cabo de Palos**

TOP 10 Outdoor Activities and Sports

1 Snorkelling and Diving

The Costa Blanca offers endless possibilities for underwater exploration, and several areas have been declared marine reserves, including the Cap de Sant Antoni near Xàbia (Jávea), the Isla de Benidorm, the Penyal d'Ifac (see pp16–17) and the Isla Tabarca (see p24–5). There are companies offering diving courses and trips in all the major resorts.

2 Adventure Sports

The mountainous inland regions are fantastic for adventure sports. You can try your hand at canyon-descent, bungee-jumping, canoeing, rafting, hang-gliding, quad-biking or off-roading.

3 Hiking and Rock-climbing

The coastal cliffs and inland sierras are perfect for hiking and climbing. The Penyal d'Ifac and the Sierra de Bernia have several challenging climbing routes, and the Natural Parks, particularly the Sierra de Espuña (see pp20–21), Font Roja (see p36), Montgó (see p36) and Calblanque (see pp8–9), offer dozens of great hikes and walking trails.



Cycling in the Calblanque Natural Park



Golf course at La Manga Club

4 Cycling

Cycling is a very popular sport in Spain. Most of the resorts have bike-rental facilities if you simply want to cruise the region on two wheels, and the Natural Parks have several off-road trails for mountain-bikers.

5 Golf

With its year-round sunshine and mild temperatures, it's hardly surprising that the Costa Blanca is one of the top golfing destinations in Europe. There are scores of courses, of which the best known is probably the luxurious La Manga Club, with three championship courses. ☎
La Manga Club: www.lamangaclub.com

6 Sailing

Most resorts have a marina offering everything from sailing courses to yacht charter and skipper hire. The biggest marinas are in Calp (Calpe), Benidorm, Alicante (Alacant), Torrevieja and Santiago de la Ribera.



7 Bird-watching

The Costa Blanca region is a paradise for bird-watchers. The salt lagoons in Calp, Torrevieja, Santa Pola and Calblanque attract numerous aquatic birds, and the sierras, particularly the Regional Park of the Sierra Espuña, are home to eagles and other birds of prey.

8 Fishing

Fishing is a long-standing obsession in Spain, but permits are often required for both freshwater and deep-sea fishing. Contact the tourist information offices or the Spanish Fishing Federation for full details. Taking an organized fishing holiday can sidestep the need for a permit, as the tour company will arrange these for you. ☎ *Spanish Fishing Federation: 91 532 8352. www.fepyc.es*



Windsurfing

9 Other Watersports

Windsurfing, surfing, water-skiing and jet-skiing are popular sports along the Costa Blanca, and you'll find facilities for all of these in all the larger resorts.

10 Horse riding

There are horse-riding centres across the region, and most can organize anything from pony rides for kids to cross-country hacks. Tourist information offices have lists of local riding centres.

Top 10 Spanish Sports Stars

1 Fernando Alonso

This young Formula One driver is widely tipped as a future Grand Prix champion.

2 Severiano Ballesteros

Perhaps the most famous golfer that Spain has ever produced, Ballesteros has now retired.

3 Sergio Garcia

This sensational young golfer has caused a storm since his first appearance on the international circuit.

4 Raúl Gonzalez

One of the top Spanish footballers, Gonzalez is currently the best-known Spanish member of the Real Madrid football team.

5 Carlos Moyá

One of Spain's greatest tennis champions, and winner of numerous titles.

6 Pedro Delgado

Champion cyclist, and winner of the Tour de France and the Vuelta de España.

7 Arantxa Sanches Vicario

Spain's finest female tennis champion has won several Grand Slam tournaments.

8 Igor Astarloa

Cycling is a Spanish passion, and Igor Astarloa is currently the world road cycling champion.

9 Juan Carlos Ferrero

One of the world's top-ranking tennis stars, Ferrero has performed consistently well in Grand Slam events.

10 Juan Carlos Navarro

Basketball is incredibly popular in Spain, and this young player from FC Barcelona is one of the best around.





Caravaca de la Cruz

TOP 10 Medieval Villages

1 Agres This delightful mountain village topped by a ruined castle makes the perfect starting point for exploring the gorgeous Sierra Mariola, with hiking trails and the traces of abandoned snow wells.

📍 Map E3

2 Cocentaina The ancient core of Cocentaina is a charming tangle of crooked streets set around the imposing Palau Condal. The palace marks the dividing point between the Christian and Arab quarters which were established after the Reconquest. A ruined Arabic watchtower still stands guard on a lofty cliff. 📍 Map E3

3 Bocairent Unexpected steps and tiny passages link the steep streets of Bocairent, piled up on a hill in the Sierra Mariola. Almost every house is surrounded by pots of ferns and geraniums. In 1843, an extraordinary bullring was hacked out of the rock. It now regularly hosts summer concerts. 📍 Map D3



Guadalest town square

4 Guadalest The most famous inland village in the Costa Blanca, Guadalest has a picture-postcard setting atop a jagged crest in a sea of mountains (see pp14–15).

5 Penáguila Time seems to have stood still in Penáguila, a small village of ochre houses huddled around a sturdy 16th-century church. On the outskirts are the immaculate flower gardens and ponds of the 19th-century Jardín de Santos. Surrounded by magnificent mountains, the ruins of an ancient castle are set among forest high above the village. 📍 Map F3

6 Polop Just a few miles inland from the hectic coast, Polop is a peaceful little village on a hill surrounded by orchards. Often overlooked in the rush to the beaches, Polop's old quarter, with its maze of narrow streets recalling its Arabic origins, invites a tranquil stroll. 📍 Map G4

7 Caravaca de la Cruz Beautifully set in rolling hills, this medieval town (see p103) resonates with history. It belonged to the Knights Templar after the Reconquest, and is dominated by the 15th-century castle. Within the castle complex is the unmissable Santuario de la Vera Cruz, which houses what is believed to be a fragment of the Cross. 📍 Map K2



8 Mula

Steeply mounted on a sheer cliff, Mula (*see p104*) is guarded by an imposing castle. Narrow streets meander between handsome squares lined with 16th-century churches and palaces. On the outskirts, there's a fine spa, in use since Roman times. Map L2



Polop village

9 Moratalla

Sleepy Moratalla dreams on a hillside in the remotest corner of Murcia, a chaotic jumble of tiled rooftops under yet another ruined castle. The streets are so steep that the locals get around on mopeds. A viewing point near the castle offers fine views across the sierra (*see p104*). Map K1

10 Cehegín

Cehegín perches gracefully on a hillside overlooking the river. Its elegant, well-preserved old quarter, with a swathe of medieval churches and mansions bearing coats of arms, still displays vestiges of its aristocratic past. The best views of the surrounding country are from a balustraded viewing point at the top. Map K2

Top 10 Castles

1 Biar

This well-preserved Arabic castle withstood a lengthy siege before finally falling to Jaime I (*see pp34–5*) in 1245. Map D4

2 Villena

High above the town, this fairytale castle has crenellated towers and sturdy ramparts (*see p73*). Map C4

3 Petrer (Petrel)

Precipitously balanced on a razor-thin cliff, this castle was built by the Arabs (*see p85*). Map D4

4 Xàtiva (Játiva)

The Romans built a fortress here, but the current castle dates back to the medieval period. Map E1

5 Banyeres de Mariola

The highest castle in the region, it dominates a lofty peak. Map D3

6 Guadalest

Little is left of Guadalest's castle, but the ruins offer panoramic views (*see pp14–15*).

7 Castillo de Santa Bárbara, Alicante (Alacant)

This imposing 18th-century fortress replaced the original Arabic castle (*see pp10–11*).

8 La Mola

This curious castle, with the only triangular tower in Europe, is cheek by jowl with a Modernista sanctuary. Map D5

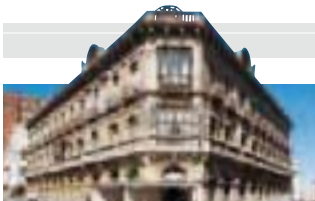
9 Castalla

Only a few ruins and a lonely tower remain of Castalla's castle. Map D4

10 Águilas

Beautifully flood-lit at night, this cliff-top castle is perched right on the cliff edge. Map L6





Left Casa de El Piñón, El Unión Right Ceiling detail, Torrevieja Casino

TOP 10 Modernista Gems

1 Casa-Museo Modernista, Novelda

The most sumptuous Modernista mansion in the Costa Blanca has been exquisitely restored, and still contains much of its original furniture (see pp18–19).



Casa-Museo Modernista, Novelda

2 Círculo Industrial, Alcoi (Alcoy)

Alcoi, still a busy industrial town, has several Modernista buildings. The Círculo Industrial (1868) was one of the earliest. Particularly worthy of note are the flowing ironwork and ceramic details in its fine salons and library. Designed as a cultural centre, it still hosts art exhibitions and the occasional concert. ☎ C/ San Nicolas 19 • Map E3 • 965 54 06 66 • Open 9am–9pm daily • Free

3 Ayuntamiento (Town Hall), Xixona (Jijona)

Xixona is most famous for the sweet nougat (*turrón*) that it produces in vast quantities, but it also contains some handsome

turn-of-the-20th-century buildings. The town hall sports a lovely façade, thickly covered with brilliant blue and gold tiles and painted griffons. ☎ Avda de la Constitución 6 • Map E4 • 965 61 03 00

4 Casino, Torrevieja

Torrevieja's celebrated seafront casino is one of the purest examples of Modernista architecture in the region. The highlight is the Mozarabic salon, with a fabulous carved wooden ceiling, horseshoe arches and shimmering mosaic tiling. ☎ Paseo Vistalegre 14 • Map Q3 • 965 71 01 04 • Visits by appointment • Free

5 Casa Modernista, Jumilla

This architectural gem of the early 20th century is tucked away in the quiet wine-producing town of Jumilla. Designed by a follower of Gaudí, it boasts impressive, highly ornate ironwork by local craftsman Avelino Gómez. ☎ C/Canovas del Castillo 55 • Map A4 • Closed to public

6 Casino, Murcia

Murcia's breathtaking casino (see pp30) is a monument to eclecticism. Each room has a different theme, from the Arabic-style entrance hall with its gorgeous ceiling which drips like icing, to the flamboyant Rococo frills and flounces in the ballroom. And there's a special bonus for female visitors: the mural of primping nymphs in the ladies' restroom.



Arabic-style patio, Casino de Murcia

7 Palacio de Aguirre, Cartagena

The most prolific Modernista architect in Cartagena at the turn of the 20th century was Victor Beltrí, who was responsible for this beautiful mansion in the heart of the old town. Profusely decorated with shimmering tiled mosaics and topped with a brilliant cupola, its corner position was chosen to ensure plenty of natural light. ☎ Plaza de la Merced 16 • Map P5 • Info from Cartagena tourist office: 968 50 16 07 • Open for occasional exhibitions

8 Casino, Cartagena

This 18th-century Baroque palace was completely overhauled at the end of the 19th century, when the property was taken over by the Casino Círculo Cartagenero, a social and cultural club. Victor Beltrí was responsible for adding the ornate Modernista woodwork, floral tiling and exuberant plasterwork, which are now sadly neglected. ☎ C/Mayor 15 • Map P5 • 968 52 55 77 • Open 10am–1:30pm, 5–9:30pm daily • Free

9 Gran Hotel, Cartagena

Crowned with its trademark golden cupola, the most emblematic Modernista building in the whole of Cartagena, the opulent Gran Hotel, was begun in 1907 by Tomás Rico and completed by the indefatigable Victor Beltrí. Every window and archway is surrounded with swooping stone garlands. It is no longer a hotel, and visitors must be content with admiring its exterior. ☎ C/Jara s/n • Map P5 • Info from Cartagena tourist office: 968 50 64 83 • Closed to public

10 Casa de El Piñón, La Unión

The Casa de El Piñón is one of the best examples of Murcian eclecticism, bristling with florid decoration and topped with a cupola which was designed by Gustave Eiffel. The building is finally being restored after years of neglect, and will eventually house local government offices. ☎ C/Mayor s/n • Map P5 • Info from La Unión tourist office: 968 541 614 • Closed to public





Moors and Christians

TOP 10 Festivals and Events

1 Semana Santa (Holy Week)

Every town and village has parades and processions during Holy Week, but the Murcia region in particular is renowned for its spectacular celebrations. The Holy Week processions in Lorca, Murcia City, Cartagena, Mula and Moratalla are all justifiably famous, but those in Alicante (Alacant) and Orihuela are also well worth seeing (*see p31*).



Semana Santa procession

2 Moros y Cristianos (Moors and Christians)

Mock battles between Moors and Christians have been held for centuries. The biggest and best is held in Alcoi (Alcoy) around 24 April, but most villages have their own version.

3 Las Hogueras de San Juan (Bonfires of Saint John)

The Feast of St John the Baptist on 24 June is celebrated in the Costa Blanca with bonfires, fireworks and parades. Alicante's festival is the biggest (*see p13*).

4 Fira de Tots Sants (All Saints Fair)

Cocentaina has celebrated All Saints on 1 November every year since 1346; it's one of the oldest traditional fairs in Spain. Originally an agricultural and grain market, it is now a hugely popular medieval-style fair selling all kinds of local produce from honey to cheese.

5 Misteri d'Elx (Elche) (Mystery of Elx)

The origins of this medieval mystery play – the only one to have survived a 17th-century ban by the Council of Trent – date back to the 13th century. It is performed in mid-August every year in the vast Basílica de Santa María in Elx (*see p83*).

6 Bous al Mar (Bulls in the Sea)

The culmination of Denia's summer festival in the first fortnight of August is the Bous al Mar, when bulls are sent careering down the streets, chased by the bravest locals; it's the locals, rather than the bulls, who end up in the sea!

7 Carnavales (Carnival)

Carnival, usually held in February, gives everyone a chance to let off steam before Lent, and there are wild parties across the region. The village of Pego in the northern Costa Blanca puts on a good show, but the best of all is in Águilas.

8 Fiesta de los Caballos del Vino (Festival of the Knights of Wine)

According to a medieval legend, the Knights Templar broke out of the besieged castle in Caravaca de la Cruz on a desperate search for water, but all they could find was wine. The story is recalled on 2 May each year, when richly dressed horses and horsemen process from the castle, and the local wine is blessed.



Festival of the Knights of Wine

9 Festival de Las Habaneras (Festival of Habaneras)

Habaneras are plaintive sea shanties, which get their name from the Cuban city where many Spaniards went to seek their fortunes – Havana. Torrevieja hosts an excellent festival in mid-August, when choral groups present contemporary and traditional songs.

10 Mar de Músicas
Held every July in Cartagena, this world music festival has become one of the best of its kind in Europe. Concerts are held in the Roman theatre, the ancient cathedral, and other beautiful settings around the old quarter. www.lamardemusicas.com

Top 10 Pilgrimages

1 Ermita de la Santa Eulalia, near Aledo

A popular pilgrimage to this mountain sanctuary. Map L4 • 7 Dec

2 Santuario de la Esperanza, Calasparra

Pilgrimage in honour of a miraculous image of the Virgin. Map K1 • 7 Sep

3 Romería de la Virgen, San Pedro del Pinatar

The image of the Virgin is taken by boat around the Mar Menor. Map P3 • 16 Jul

4 Romería de la Virgen de la Salud, Archena

A traditional pilgrimage in honour of the town's patron saint. Map M2 • 1 Sep

5 Santuario del Monte de la Atalaya, Cieza

A procession from Cieza to the mountain sanctuary of the Virgen del Buen Suceso. Map M1 • 2nd Sun in Sep

6 Santuario de Nuestra Señora de la Fuensanta, Murcia

Pilgrimage to honour Murcia's patron saint. Map N3 • Sep

7 Santuario del Mare de Déu del Castell, Agres

Pilgrimage in honour of a miraculous appearance of the Virgin. Map E3

8 Monasterio de la Santa Faz, Alicante

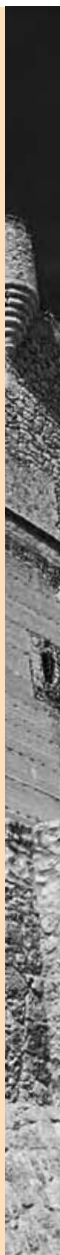
Hugely popular pilgrimage to this monastery (see p12). Map E5 • Thu after Easter Sun

9 Santuario de la Virgen de los Lirios, nr Alcoi

A pilgrimage in honour of Alcoi's patron saint. Map E3 • 2nd Sun in Sep

10 Santuario de la Virgen de las Virtudes, Villena

In honour of Villena's patron saint. Map C4 • mid-Apr





Left Colegio de Santa Dominga, Orihuela Right Church of San Patricio, Lorca

TOP 10 Churches and Monasteries

1 Catedral de Santa María, Murcia

Murcia's impressive cathedral is best known for its flamboyant, sculpture-encrusted façade and florid bell tower (see pp28–9).

2 Colegio de Santo Domingo, Orihuela

Often dubbed the "El Escorial of the East" after the celebrated royal palace near Madrid, this enormous complex was built between the 16th and 18th centuries. ☎ C/Adolfo Claravana 63 • Map 00 • Open 10am–1:30pm, 4–7pm Tue–Fri, 10am–2pm, 4–7pm Sat, 10am–2pm Sun • Free

3 Santa Iglesia Catedral del Salvador, Orihuela

Orihuela's Gothic cathedral of pale, creamy stone was begun in the 14th century. There is exquisite sculptural detail inside and out. Two beautiful wrought-iron grills enclose the choir, with its magnificent Baroque organ, and the main altar. ☎ Plaza Salvador • Map 00 • Open 10am–1pm, 5–7pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun • Free

4 Ex-colegiata de San Patricio, Lorca

This splendid church commemorates victories against the Arabs on the feast day of San Patricio in 1452. Begun in the mid-16th century, it was given a thorough Baroque overhaul in the 18th. ☎ Plaza España • Map 00 • Info: 968 46 61 57 (tourist office) • Open 11am–1:30pm, 4:30–6:30pm daily • Free



Concatedral de San Nicolás de Bari, Alicante

5 Basílica de Santa María, Elx (Elche)

Celebrated for its performances of the Misteri d'Elx (see p50), the monumental Basílica de Santa María was built between 1672 and 1783, replacing an earlier church built on the ruins of a former mosque. ☎ Plaza de Santa María • Map 00 • Info: 965 45 15 40 • Open 11am–6pm (bell tower: 11am–7pm) daily • Adm charge

6 Concatedral de San Nicolás de Bari, Alicante (Alacant)

Dedicated to the city's patron saint, Alicante's vast cathedral (see p12) was built in the sober Herreran style. Its most striking feature is the graceful cupola almost 50 m (164 ft) high.

7 Iglesia de Santa María, Alicante

This delightful church was built on the ruins of Al-Lekant's main mosque before the Reconquest. The soaring interior is in the purest Gothic style. The frothy façade was added in 1713.



8 Iglesia de San Bartolomé, Xàbia (Jávea)

The fortress-church of San Bartolomé was begun in 1513, when the coastline was under constant attack from pirates, but the golden Tosca stone and its faded sculptural decoration make it truly charming. ☎ *Plaza de la Iglesia* • Map 00 • 965 79 11 74 • Open 10:30am–1pm, 5:30–7:30pm Mon–Wed & Fri, 10:30am–1pm Sat–Sun • Free

9 Colegiata Basílica de Santa María, Xàtiva (Játiva)

The grandest church in this “City of Popes” was begun in 1596, but remains unfinished. The façade was finally constructed in 1916; the second bell tower (proposed 300 years ago) has yet to be built. ☎ *Plaza Calixto III* • Map 00 • Info: 962 27 33 46 (tourist office) • Open 10:30am–1pm daily • Free

10 Iglesia de San Martín, Callosa de Segura

Once one of the most affluent cities of the old Kingdom of Valencia, Callosa de Segura possesses one of the finest Renaissance churches in Spain. ☎ *Plaza de la Iglesia* • Map 00 • 965 31 02 98 • Open 10am–1pm daily • Free



Iglesia de San Bartolomé, Xàbia

Top 10 Architectural Styles and Terms

1 Romanesque (c.1050–c.1200)

Inspired by Roman architecture; characterized by rounded arches and tunnel vaults.

2 Gothic (c.1250–1550)

Typical features: elaborate masonry and woodwork, pointed arches and exterior flying buttresses.

3 Renaissance (c.1450–1600)

Renaissance architects took inspiration from monuments of Greco-Roman civilization.

4 Baroque (c.1600–1750)

Spanish Baroque features undulating façades with high relief and ornate decoration.

5 Modernista (c.1880–c.1920)

A regional variation on Art Nouveau: flowing lines, organic forms, and highly detailed decorative elements.

6 Múdejar

A fusion of Christian and Islamic art created by the Arabs who remained in Spain after the Reconquest.

7 Artesonado

Elaborately carved marquetry ceilings introduced by the Arabs, but absorbed into the Christian tradition after the Reconquest.

8 Azulejos

Elaborate tiles, many produced in the Costa Blanca region using techniques introduced by the Arabs.

9 Churrigueresque

The Baroque style at its most ornate and overblown.

10 Retablo Mayor

An altarpiece, usually featuring a series of painted panels, decorates the main altar in most Spanish churches.





Left MARQ Right Museo de la Asegurada



TOP 10 Museums

1 MARQ, Alicante (Alacant)

This slickly designed new museum (*see p12*) brings Alicante's past to life. As well as sections devoted to each phase of history, there are fascinating recreations of archeological sites, including an old graveyard and a wreck containing amphorae.



Tesoro de Villena

of bracelets, bowls, torcs and bottles, fashioned from thin

sheets of beaten gold, and skilfully decorated with simple incisions or raised patterns. ☎

Palacio Municipal, Plaza de Santiago 1 • Map C4

• 965 80 11 50 (ext 766)

• www.museovillena.com

• Open 10am–2pm, 5–8pm

Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm Sat

• Free

2 Museo de la Asegurada, Alicante

Alicante's finest civic Gothic building has been sensitively converted to hold its collection of 20th-century art. Mobiles and kinetic works by the Alicantino artist Eusebio Sempere feature strongly, but there are also paintings by Juan Gris, sculptures by Eduardo Chillida, and sketches by Picasso and Dalí (*see p12*).

3 MuBag, Alicante

A beautifully restored 18th-century palace houses this wide-ranging collection of paintings, furniture, ceramics and engravings by Alicantino artists. ☎ *Palacio Conde Lumiares, C/Gravina 13–15 • Map V2 • 965 14 67 80 • www.mubag.org • Open 10am–2pm, 4–8pm Tue–Sat (May–Sep: 5–9pm), 10am–2pm Sun • Free*

4 Museo Arqueológico, Villena

The prize exhibit here is the Villena Treasure (Tesoro de Villena) – a glittering Bronze Age hoard

5 Museo del Calzado, Elda

This intriguing museum in Spain's shoe-making capital documents the evolution of shoe design from the early spurred metal boots worn by medieval knights to the most extravagant 21st-century creations. If you love shoes, don't miss it. ☎ *Avda de Chapí 32 • Map D4 • 965 38 30 21 • Open Sep–Jul: 10am–1pm, 4–8pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun; Aug: Tue–Fri 10am–2pm • www.museocalzado.com • Adm charge*



Portrait of Felipe V, Museo de l'Almudí

6 Museo San Juan de D  s, Orihuela

The 18th-century Hospital of San Juan de D  s is the graceful home of Orihuela's archaeological museum, which recounts the history of the city from its earliest beginnings to the 18th century. The eeriest exhibit is a 17th-century processional float depicting a she-devil known as *La Diablessa*. C/Hospital • Map

P2 • 966 74 31 54 • Open 10am–2pm, 5–8pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun • Free

7 Museo de l'Almud  , X  tiva (J  tiva)

This much-restored 16th-century granary is home to fragments of Iberian sculpture and Visigothic capitals, as well as a large collection of paintings, including several works by X  tiva-born Jos   de Ribera. A portrait of King Felipe V is famously hung the wrong way up, as punishment for his burning the city down in 1707. C/Corre  ria 46 • Map E1 • 962 27 65 97 • Open summer: 9:30am–2:30pm Tue–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat–Sun; winter 10am–2pm, 4–6pm Tue–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat–Sun • Adm charge

8 Museu Valenci   del Joguet, Ibi

Kids of all ages will enjoy this museum, which has everything from puppets to train sets, miniature tea services and model aeroplanes. The exhibits date mainly from the early 20th century, and come from all parts of the world. C/Aurora P  rez Caballero 4 • Map E4 • 966 55 02 26 • Open 10am–1pm, 4–7pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun • www.museojoguete.com • Adm charge

9 Museo Salzillo, Murcia

Dedicated to the 18th-century Murcian sculptor Francisco Salzillo (see pp30–31), this museum contains a collection of gilded processional floats bearing his exquisite, highly emotional depictions of the Passion of Christ. Adjoining galleries display a large number of nativity figures (*belenes*).

10 Museo Nacional de Arqueolog   Mar  tima, Cartagena

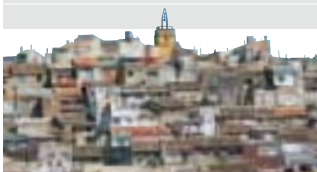
Artifacts dating back to Phoenician times illustrate Cartagena's long maritime history. There's a vast collection of ancient amphorae, and early maps and documents attesting to the city's importance 2,000 years ago. C/Dique de

Navidad s/n • Map P5 • 968 12 11 66 • Open 9:30am–3pm Tue–Sat, 10am–3pm Sun • Adm charge



La Diablessa



Left **Bullas** Right **Hondón****TOP 10 Wine Towns**

1 Jumilla One of the largest wine-producing towns in Murcia, Jumilla spills down a hillside, overlooked by a 15th-century castle (see p103). The town has been producing wine since Roman times. The local *bodegas* make a robust red from monastrell and tempranillo grapes. 📍 Map A4

**Jumilla Castle**

2 Yecla Yecla is the prettiest of all the wine towns in the Costa Blanca, with a smattering of historic churches and buildings. It's best known for its red wines, which are generally light and fruity. Many *bodegas* offer tastings and tours. 📍 Map B4

3 Bullas This medieval village, still guarded by the remnants of a battered castle, sits in a lush valley with endless snaking rows of vines. Wine has been produced here since Roman times; you can learn about its history at the local Museo del Vino. Good for rosés and red table wines. 📍 Map L2

4 Abanilla Abanilla is a small, sunny agricultural town known for its palm groves. Although tucked just inside the boundary of Murcia province, it produces much of its wine under the Alicante D.O. – robust reds and some whites, usually drunk young and ideally suited to the earthy local cuisine. 📍 Map N1

5 Monóvar A cheerful old town dotted with historic monuments, Monóvar is one of the biggest wine-producing towns in the Alicante region. At the many *bodegas* you can pick up some potent local red, a fresh rosé, or the celebrated El Fondillón, a sweet dessert wine which takes 20 years to mature. 📍 Map D5

6 Alguenya (Algueña) This small agricultural village is well known for its hearty traditional cuisine, particularly cured sausages. The local wine, a strong, earthy red produced under the D.O. of Alicante, is perfect with regional dishes. 📍 Map C5

7 Hondón Blink and you'll miss these two tiny hamlets in the middle of a vast plain with vines stretching in every direction. Hondón de las Nieves and Hondón de los Frailes are just off the Monóvar–Jumilla road. Their table wines are available from the large *bodegas* which line the road. 📍 Map C5



8 El Pinós (Pinoso)

Sitting peacefully on a low hill in a broad, vine-covered plain, El Pinós is an affluent little town with a rambling old centre curling around a pretty clock tower. It made its fortune from salt and cured sausages, but it is also an important wine-producing town. Try the vigorous young reds at one of many *bodegas*.

📍 Map E5

9 Teulada

The smart, upmarket resort of Teulada has long been famous for its moscatel grapes, grown along the sunny hillsides and sold in markets and at roadside stalls. They are used to make its delicious and refreshing sweet white *mistela* wine, which you will find at countless local *bodegas*. 📍 Map H3

10 Xaló (Jalón)

Dominated by its striking 19th-century church, the formerly sleepy village of Xaló is now surrounded by endless villas and holiday home developments. These days, tourism is its biggest source of income, but some traditions, including wine-production, have continued. There are several *bodegas*, with reds, whites, rosés and a sweet white *mistela* wine. 📍 Map G3



The vineyards of Monóvar

Top 10 Bodegas

1 Bodegas Balcona

The red Partal Crianza 2001 is the one to go for here. 📍 Ctra Avilés Km 10, Cehegín • Map K2 • 968 43 33 07

2 Bodegas Agapito Rico

Excellent reds under the Cachelo label. 📍 Casa de la Hoya s/n, Paraje El Carche, Jumilla • Map A4 • 968 75 71 72

3 Bodegas Bleda

Try the award-winning Castillo de Jumilla Crianza 2000. 📍 Avenida Yecla 26, Jumilla • Map A4 • 968 78 00 12

4 Bodegas Huertas

Established in 1996, with a dynamic young owner. 📍 Ctra Murcia Km 68, Jumilla • Map A4 • 968 78 30 61

5 Bodegas E Mendoza

Taste the excellent Reserva Santa Rosa. 📍 Partida El Romeral s/n, L'Alfas del Pi • Map G4 • 965 88 86 39

6 Bodegas Castaño

Very reputable, with delicious fruity reds. 📍 Ctra Fuenteálamo 3, Yecla • Map B4 • 968 79 11 15

7 Salvador Poveda

Pick up some of the famous Fondillón wine. 📍 C/ Benjamín Palencia 19, Monóvar • Map D5 • 966 96 01 80

8 Laderas de Pinoso

A new venture for two eminent wine-makers. 📍 C/El Sequé 59, El Pinós • Map E5 • 968 43 51 37

9 Cooperativo Virgen Pobre de Xaló

Try the Vall de Xaló 2002. 📍 Crta Xaló (Jalón-Alcalalí), Xaló • Map G3 • 966 48 00 34

10 Bodegas 1890

One of the oldest and biggest wine producers in Spain. 📍 Ctra de Murcia, s/n, Jumilla • Map A4 • 968 75 81 00



Left **Aquopolis, Torrevieja** Right **Terra Mítica****TOP 10 Family Attractions****Cuevas de Canalobre**

1 Terra Mítica
The biggest, most exciting theme park on the Costa Blanca, Terra Mítica has everything from thrilling rollercoasters to huge waterslides. Each section is dedicated to one of the great Mediterranean civilizations, including the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and Iberians. ☎ *Ctra Benidorm-Finestrat, Partida del Moralet s/n* • Map F4 • 902 02 02 20 • www.terramiticapark.com • Open summer: 10am–midnight daily; winter: 10am–8pm daily. Closed mid-Dec–end Mar • Adm charge

2 Cuevas de Canalobre
One of the biggest attractions on the Costa Blanca, this vast cavern, theatrically lit, gets its name from an amazing limestone outcrop in the form of a candelabra. Concerts are regularly held here in summer. ☎ *Xixona (Jijona)* • Map E4 • 965 69 92 50 • www.canelobre.com • Open Easter week and mid-Jun–Sep: 10:30am–7:50pm daily; Oct–mid-Jun: 11am–5:50pm • Adm charge

3 Aquopolis, Torrevieja
This big, fun water-park has everything to keep the kids happy, from waterslides of all heights and shapes to wave pools and assorted swimming pools. There are special areas for toddlers, and plenty of snack bars and ice-cream shops. ☎ *Finca La Olla Grande s/n* • Map Q3 • 965 71 58 90 • www.aquopolis.es • Open mid-Jun–mid-Sep: 11am–7pm daily; mid–end Sep: 11am–6pm daily • Adm charge

4 Mundomar, Benidorm
At this huge marine park, you can admire the flamingoes, penguins and turtles, or enter a spooky bat cave. Dolphins, sea lions and parrots perform spectacular shows. Other attractions include racoons and prairie dogs, and there's a special section for very young kids. ☎ *Sierra Helada s/n, Rincón de Loix, Benidorm* • Map G4 • 965 86 91 01 • www.mundomar.es • Open 10am–8:30pm daily • Adm charge

**Dolphins at Mundomar, Benidorm**

5 Safari Aitana, Penàguila
Tucked away in the Aitana Mountains, this safari park has lions, tigers, giraffes, elephants and an aviary with huge birds of prey. There is a small petting zoo for smaller children, a restaurant, and a swimming pool to cool off in. C/del Sella, nr Penàguila • Map F3 • 965 52 92 73 • www.safariaitana.com • Open 11am–6:30pm daily • Adm charge

6 Safari Park Vergel, Vergel (Verger)
Drive past lions, tigers, wolves and leopards at this safari park, where the animals roam freely. There are shows with parrots, seals and dolphins, and a petting area with goats, pigs and ponies. Ctra El Verger–Pego • Map G2 • 966 43 98 08 • Open summer: 10am–7pm daily; winter: 10am–5pm daily • Adm charge

7 Mundo Marino
One of the best ways to admire the stunning coastline is to take a ride in a glass-bottomed boat. This service offers full-day trips (including beach barbecue) from Denia (Dénia), Xàbia (Jávea), Calp (Calpe) and Altea. Various departure points • Map H2, H3, G3, G4 • 966 42 30 66 • www.mundomarino.es • Times vary • Adm charge

8 Pola Park, Santa Pola
This brightly coloured fun-park on the edge of Santa Pola has over 50 attractions, including carousels, pirate boats and all kinds of rides. Avda Zaragoza s/n • Map E6, Q1 • 965 41 70 60 • www.polapark.com • Open Apr–Jun, Sep: 10am–2:30pm, 4–10pm Sat, Sun; Jul–Aug: 7:30pm–2:30am daily (closed Oct–Mar) • Adm charge



Mundo Marino boat trip

9 El Arca, Benimantell
Also known as “Noah’s Ark”, this wonderful wildlife sanctuary close to Guadalest (see pp14–15) is dedicated to the care of sick, abandoned and mistreated animals. The animals live in compounds designed to resemble their natural habitats, and their stories are outlined on special panels. Finca el Castellet 10, Benimantell • Map F3 • 965 97 23 59 • Open 10am–8:30pm daily • Adm charge

10 Karting La Cala
Kids (seven and over) will get a kick out of this racetrack, one of the best karting circuits in Europe. The eight-minute slots are designed to test skill, speed and endurance. nr Benidorm, Ctra Alicante–Valencia Km 116 • Map F4 • 965 89 46 76 • Open summer: 10am–9pm daily; winter: 10am–5:30pm daily • Adm charge



Left **La Puerta Falsa, Murcia** Right **El Caribe, Alicante****TOP 10 Nightspots****1 Barrio de Santa Cruz, Alicante (Alacant)**

Every street in Alicante's atmospheric old quarter is packed solid with bars and nightclubs which start late and don't stop until dawn. There's a good mix of styles and places to go, with something to suit most tastes and age groups. 📍 *Map U2*

2 El Caribe, Alicante

Latino dance fans will enjoy this hugely popular *salsateca*, where the local South American community come to dance all night long. If you haven't got the moves, you can pick them up at the free *salsa* and *merengue* lessons. 📍 *C/Gral Primo de Rivera 14 • Map U2 • no tel*

3 Tablao Zambra, Alicante

For a taste of Andalucía, make a date at the Tablao Zambra in Campelló, just up the coast from Alicante. The show is geared toward tourists, but the dancers and musicians are all incredibly talented. 📍 *C/San Pedro 61, El Campelló • Map E5 • 965 63 23 10 • Open summer*

4 C/Mallorca, C/Ibiza and C/Palma, Benidorm

Benidorm's nightlife is divided by nationality: these streets are the heart of the English section, and are lined with a string of brash bars strictly for the under-30s. Most offer karaoke, theme nights and the kind of good time that you won't remember in the morning. 📍 *Map G4*

**Penélope, Benidorm****5 Penélope, Benidorm**

One of the coolest clubs in Benidorm, with a perfect beachfront location, this is a great place to start the night. If you decide to stick around, things begin to hot up, with top DJs, go-go dancers and a slick, well-dressed crowd. 📍 *Avda de Alcoi 10 • Map G4 • 965 86 33 60*

6 KM, Benidorm

KM is one of Benidorm's best-known mega-clubs, featuring some of Spain's top DJs spinning everything from Spanish pop to the latest dance tracks. Also on this strip are Penélope, Pachá, and Manssion. 📍 *Ctra Alicante-Valencia Km 122 • Map G4 • 965 86 35 23*

7 Pachá, Torrevieja

An outpost of the celebrated international club, Pachá offers a great night out in Torrevieja. Music is provided by an excellent line-up of Spanish and international DJs. A young crowd keeps the place buzzing until very late. 📍 *Avda Delfina Viudes • Map Q3 • 965 70 48 78*



8 Gran Casino, Murcia
Murcia's smart casino is located in its fanciest hotel, the Rincón de Pepe (see p126). You can gamble away your holiday money at blackjack, american roulette, french roulette and poker, or just stick to the slot machines. As for all the Costa Blanca casinos, the dress code is smart-casual, and you'll need your passport. If you can still afford it, finish your evening in the hotel's excellent restaurant (see p109). ☎ C/Apóstoles 34 • Map U6 • 968 21 23 08

9 La Puerta Falsa, Murcia
La Puerta Falsa is a classic on the Murcian music scene, a relaxed, bohemian spot which features live acts from Tuesday to Saturday nights. The music on offer spans everything from jazz, soul and blues to hip-hop and tango. There are also poetry readings and *tertúlias* (discussion groups). ☎ C/San Martín de Porres 5 • Map U4 • 968 20 04 84

10 Revival, Alicante
Revival is one of the most popular discos on the "techno route" on the outskirts of Alicante, but be warned, it's for committed dance fans only; it keeps going non-stop from Saturday night right through until Monday morning. ☎ Los Montesinos • Map E5 • 966 72 16 41



Pachá, Torrevieja

Top 10 Tips for Clubbers

- 1 Don't Arrive Too Early**
Be prepared for a late night; clubs in Spain rarely get going before 1am.
- 2 Dress to Impress**
Take some trouble over your appearance; local clubbers make a big effort. Note that many clubs don't allow trainers (sports shoes).
- 3 Trensnochador**
A special train service between Alicante and Altea runs all through the night in July and August.
- 4 Free Drinks**
Club admission prices usually include one drink, so make sure that you hang on to your ticket.
- 5 Flyers**
You can get flyers on special one-off musical events from local music shops.
- 6 Terrazas**
Many of the clubs on the Costa Blanca have outdoor terraces, which offer welcome respite from the rigours of the dance floor.
- 7 Proceed with Caution**
Boys beware: Spanish women are usually surrounded by protective boyfriends or brothers.
- 8 Drugs**
Drugs may well be offered to you, but they are illegal in Spain, and the penalties for possession are tough. Just say no!
- 9 Special Events**
You can get information about special events at www.clubbingpain.com
- 10 Beach Parties**
Beach parties are common, free and entirely spontaneous.





Left Eating paella Middle The author enjoying a delicious Orxata Right Oranges



TOP 10 Culinary Highlights: Alicante

1 Paella

A genuine *paella* is made with round *bomba* rice (to soak up the stock), and delicately flavoured with garlic and saffron. Just before completion, the heat is turned up to create a light crust (*soccarat*). Everyone has their own recipe, which can include seafood, meat, vegetables or a mixture of all three.

2 Rice Dishes

Alicante is famous for the breathtaking variety of its rice dishes, ranging from the pungent *arroz negro*, cooked in squid ink, to *arroz a la banda*, similar to *paella* and made with many different kinds of fish. (Dársena serves almost 200 types – see p66.)



Arroz negro

3 Caldero

This rich, liquid stew, usually made with broth, rice and seafood, exists in many regional variations. One of the best known is the *caldero tabarquino*, a speciality of the Isla Tabarca (see p24). Inland variations will often incorporate locally raised meat and game, or add some highly flavoured cured sausage.

4 Ollas

These traditional stews, named after the earthenware pot in which they are cooked, are common in the mountainous inland regions, particularly

around Alcoi (Alcoy). Most *ollas* are made with whatever is available, but they usually contain dried beans, chickpeas (*garbanzos*) and root vegetables, and are flavoured with cured sausage.

5 Seafood

The abundance and variety of seafood on the Costa Blanca is astonishing. Fish is often simply grilled or fried, or used in the many rice dishes. *Dorada a la sal* (sea bream baked in rock salt) is common and delicious. Try Dénia's famous and very tasty prawns.

6 Orxata (Horchata)

Orxata is a sweet, creamy drink made from ground tiger-nuts (*chufas*) – tastier and more refreshing than it might sound. Alicante produces a regional variation made with almonds. In summer, it's particularly delicious served with crushed ice (*orxata granizada*). Look out for the sign "artesanal" – the home-made varieties are infinitely better than the bottled kind.



A selection of shellfish

7 Fruit and Vegetables

The Costa Blanca has long been known as the "orchard of Spain"; it produces vast quantities of fruit and vegetables, including oranges and lemons, the deliciously tart *nísperos*, almonds, olives and grapes. Head for any local market for a taste of the incredible variety on offer.

8 Alicante Wine

Alicante's main wine-producing regions are around Monóvar and El Pinós (see pp56–7), which make robust reds and a famous sweet dessert wine called El Fondillón. Teulada also produces good sweet dessert wines called *mistelas*.



Market stall, Elx (Elche)

9 Turrón

Anyone with a sweet tooth will be in heaven in the Costa Blanca, which is famous for *turrón*, the delicious local nougat made with honey and nuts. There are two kinds: a soft version made in Xixona (Jijona), the biggest producer of *turrón*, and a crunchier kind made in Alicante.

10 Chocolate

Chocoholics should make a pilgrimage to the seaside town of La Vila Joiosa (Villajoyosa), which has been making chocolate for almost 300 years. A museum devoted to the subject is run by Valor, one of the biggest chocolate-makers in Spain. Best of all, it offers tastings.

Top 10 Markets

1 Alicante (Alacant)

Alicante's Modernista-style market has all kinds of delicious fresh produce, and pretty flower stalls.

2 Santa Pola

Santa Pola holds a huge outdoor market on Saturdays, with everything from local produce to clothes and shoes.

3 Calp (Calpe)

Calp's fast and furious fish auction is held from 5pm Monday to Friday, and features the latest technology.

4 La Vila Joiosa (Villajoyosa)

A colourful market with lots of art and antiques takes place in the old town on Sunday mornings.

5 Xàtiva (Játiva)

A delightful, sprawling street market, with everything from food to socks, takes place in the old town.

6 Altea

An art market is held every evening during summer in the Plaza Iglesia at the top of the old village.

7 Benidorm

A big market is held every Wednesday in Benidorm, with lots of fresh food, as well as clothes and souvenirs.

8 Elx (Elche)

Famous for its palm grove (see pp22–3), Elx holds its weekly market on Mondays.

9 Gata de Gorgos

This market features local crafts (particularly wicker furniture – see p74), as well as food stalls.

10 Polop

This pretty medieval village (see p46) hosts a bric-a-brac market on Saturday mornings.



Left **Embutidos** Right **Orange tree in fruit**

TOP 10 Culinary Highlights: Murcia

1 Embutidos
Inland Murcia is celebrated for its cured pork sausages (*embutidos*), including a dark blood sausage known as *morcilla*, as well as countless other types of varying spiciness and flavour. They are easily found in butchers' shops and markets, and regularly feature on the menu at tapas bars.

2 Empanadas
Empanadas, deliciously light pastry parcels stuffed with all kinds of fillings from tuna to ham, are common throughout Spain, but the best are made in Murcia. The perfect picnic dish, they are available in almost every bakery and tapas bar.

**Empanadas**

3 Seafood
Like so much of the Mediterranean coast, Murcia's fishing villages provide a wealth of wonderful fresh seafood. The famously sweet prawns from the Mar Menor, sea bream cooked in rock salt (*dorada a la sal*), and a highly spiced version of the *caldero* (see p62) are all typical of the region.

**Dorada a la sal**

4 Moorish Sweets
The Arabic influence in Spain is all-pervasive – it's strongly felt even in Murcia's sweets and pastries. Try the caramelized almonds, the fresh *yemas* (made with egg yolks and lemon) – these are especially good around Caravaca de la Cruz – and *paparajotes*, exquisitely light lemon or orange pastries delicately flavoured with cinnamon. Irresistible!

5 Rice
Rice has been grown in the Calasparra region for more than a thousand years, and it now enjoys its own D.O. (*denominación de origen*), which guarantees the quality. Most of the rice produced here is of the small, plump, *bomba* variety, which is often used in the traditional fisherman's stew *caldero*. *Bomba* rice is ideal, as it soaks up the fish broth to perfection.

6 Fruit and vegetables
The ghostly outlines of enormous greenhouses can be seen throughout much of the province. The main crops are tomatoes and capers (of which Murcia is the world's largest producer), but the fertile lands of the Segura and Ricote valleys produce a dazzling array of fresh fruit and vegetables, which always feature prominently in local dishes.



7 Fritás de Moratalla
These are a delicious local variation of the popular Spanish *churros* (fried dough strips) – here they are sweetened with honey. You'll find them at stalls during all the local festivals, as well as in the cafés and cake shops around the sleepy hill village of Moratalla.



Ordering Fritás de Moratalla

8 Murcian Wine
Jumilla, Yecla and Bullas (see p56) have all been granted their own D.O., and produce a range of whites, reds and rosés. The powerful red wines, usually drunk young, are the best known outside of Spain, but Bullas is also notable for its refreshing rosés – perfect summer drinking.

9 Stews
Murcia has lots of wonderful traditional stews, including the *olla gitana*, a hearty chickpea and vegetable stew from the fertile Segura valley, and the *zarangollo murciano*, a tasty mixture of pumpkin, onion and tomato.

10 Meat and Game
Murcia's lush interior produces excellent local meat and game, and many dishes feature rabbit, hare, venison, partridge and quail. The most famous dish is *chuletas de cordero al ajo cabañil* – lamb chops served with a piquant dressing of garlic, vinegar and bay leaf.

Top 10 Murcian Meat Dishes

1 El Pastel de Cierva
A traditional meat pie of veal, *chorizo*, egg, brains and minced meat, wrapped in pastry and baked in the oven.

2 Migas con Tropezones
Breadcrumbs fried with small pieces of pork – or with cured sausage.

3 Tartera Caravaqueña de Cordero
This lamb pie is a typical dish from Caravaca de la Cruz.

4 Cabezas de Cordero al Horno
For the gastronomically adventurous – lambs' heads roasted in the oven with tomatoes, garlic and wine.

5 Cordero Asado a la Murciana
A rustic dish of roast lamb with potatoes, parsley, garlic and pine nuts.

6 Gazpacho Jumillano
Murcian *gazpachos* are thick stews, unlike the popular chilled Andalusian soup of the same name. This one is made with rabbit and vegetables, and is served hot.

7 Cabrito en Salsa
Kid cooked with a piquant, garlicky sauce – popular in the northern sierras of Murcia.

8 Cordero en Pepitoria
Lamb's foot braised in a wine and herb sauce, delicately flavoured with saffron, bay leaves and parsley.

9 Empanada de Liebre, Arroz y Conejo
A hearty meat pasty made with chunks of hare and rabbit mixed with rice.

10 Perdiz con Judía
This local pheasant dish is cooked with beans, bay leaves and garlic.



Left **Rincón de Pepe** Right **Girasol****TOP 10 Restaurants**

1 Girasol, Moraira
In this mecca for gourmets, with exquisite views over the hills and coast, chef Joachim Koerper prepares impeccable, award-winning Mediterranean cuisine using the finest local produce. ☎ *Ctra Moraira-Calpe Km 1.5* • Map M3 • 965 74 43 73 • Closed Sun D, Mon except Jul, Aug (Jul, Aug: D only, daily) • €€€€€

2 El Poblet, Denia (Dénia)
Dynamic young chef Enrique Dacosta gives traditional rice dishes a highly creative twist at this excellent restaurant with a wonderful, breezy terrace. This is the very best place to try Denia's famous prawns, cooked to perfection. ☎ *Ctra Las Marinas Km 2.5* • Map H2 • 965 78 41 79 • Closed Sun D, Mon (except Aug), 3 weeks Feb-Mar, 20 Dec-1 Jan • €€€€€

3 Casa Patricio, Abdet
This delightful country restaurant just a few miles from the tourist enclave of Guadalest serves sturdy mountain dishes like rabbit cooked with almonds, or *olleta de blat*, a traditional

**Dársena****El Poblet**

stew prepared to a centuries-old recipe. ☎ *C/Arriba 37* • Map F3 • 965 88 53 10 • Closed Mon (except hols and Jul) • €€€

4 Hostería de Mont Sant, Xàtiva (Játiva)
Set in a charming small hotel in jasmine-scented gardens above the historic town of Xàtiva (see p124), the restaurant specializes in traditional regional dishes, but the highlight is the romantic garden setting. ☎ *Subido al Castillo s/n* • Map E1 • 962 27 50 81 • €€€€

5 Dársena, Alicante (Alacant)
With a perfect location on the port, Dársena resembles a great white ship, right down to its round windows and gleaming brass lamps. The speciality is rice; the menu offers almost 200 different rice dishes. The *arroz a la banda* is particularly good. ☎ *Muelle de Levante 6* • Map E5 • 965 20 73 99 • €€€€



6 Piripi, Alicante

Smart and stylish, Piripi serves some of the finest traditional rice dishes in the whole city. Try their delectable *arroz con sepionet con alcachofas* cooked with baby squid and artichokes, but save room for the delicious home-made desserts. The tapas bar is a local institution. C/Oscar Esplá 30 • Map S3 • 965 22 79 40 • €€€

7 Casa Joaquín, Santa Pola

Not far from the port, this relaxed and informal little restaurant is wholeheartedly dedicated to seafood, and serves up whatever is freshest that day. You are in luck if the traditional fishermen's stew *caldero* is on the menu – the restaurant makes one of the tastiest versions around. Plaza Félix de Rodríguez de la Fuente 9 • Map E6, Q1 • 965 41 12 82 • Closed Wed • €€

8 Rincón de Pepe, Murcia

The plushiest restaurant in Murcia City, Rincón de Pepe serves exquisitely prepared fresh seafood from the Mar Menor (including a fine seafood stew with sea bass and clams), as well as locally reared meats which are grilled to perfection. Old-fashioned in the best sense, it offers impeccable service and a splendid, rather formal setting. C/Apóstoles 34 • Map U6 • 968 21 22 39 • Closed Sun D • €€€€

9 Hostería Palacete Rural la Seda, nr Murcia

A beautiful 17th-century silk factory has been handsomely converted to house this elegant restaurant in a rural setting on the outskirts of Murcia City. It uses the freshest local produce, including fruit and vegetables grown in its own orchard, as well



Piripi

as freshly caught seafood from the Mar Menor. Vereda del Catalán s/n, Santa Cruz (8km from Murcia City) • Map N2 • 968 87 08 48 • Closed Sun • €€€€€

10 Los Sauces, nr Cartagena

Chef Pedro Morena creates some of the most imaginative fare in Murcia at this excellent chalet-style restaurant. The menu leans toward Basque and French cuisine, with seafood taking pride of place (although there are plenty of delicious options for meat-eaters too). Ctra La Palma Km 4.5 • Map P5 • 968 53 07 58 • Closed Sun D • €€€







AROUND COSTA BLANCA

Northern Costa Blanca
70–79

Southern Costa Blanca
82–91

Costa Cálida
92–99

Inland Murcia
102–109

COSTA BLANCA'S TOP 10



Left Xàbia (Jávea) town centre Right Denia (Dénia)

Northern Costa Blanca

THE WINDSWEPT CAPES AND ENTICING COVES of the northern Costa Blanca have attracted settlers for thousands of years, but the trickle became a deluge during the 1960s. It's easy to see the allure of the magnificent coastline, with its jagged cliffs and secret coves of turquoise water, but the coastal strip is only half the story. Just a few miles inland, remote sierras and lush valleys survive untouched, with whitewashed villages dreaming on hilltops, waterfalls plunging into natural pools, and ruined castles and ancient towns recalling an illustrious past.



Penyal d'Ifac (Peñón d'Ifach)

10 Sights

- 1 Gandia (Gandía)
- 2 Xàtiva (Játiva)
- 3 Val de Gallinera
- 4 Denia (Dénia)
- 5 Xàbia (Jávea)
- 6 Penyal d'Ifac (Peñón d'Ifach)
- 7 Guadalest
- 8 Parc de l'Aigüera, Benidorm
- 9 Callosa d'en Sarrià and Fonts d'Algar
- 10 Villena



1 Gandia (Gandía)

Gandia's history is inextricably bound up with the Borjas; the opulent Gothic palace which was their family home has been impeccably restored (*see pp26–7*). The only other reminder of the town's historic importance is the serene Gothic church of Santa María. A resort town, Gandía-Playa, has grown up around the port, with famously well-manicured beaches (*see p40*) and a buzzing nightlife scene in summer. Map F2



Xàtiva Castle

2 Xàtiva (Játiva)

This ancient mountain town is known as the "City of Two Popes" – Alexander VI and Calixto III (both Borjas) were born here. Piled steeply on a hillside, the narrow streets and arcaded squares are still scattered with handsome churches and escutcheoned mansions, which attest to its medieval importance. It's topped with a fine castle offering incredible views (*see also pp53, 55, 63*). Map E1

3 Val de Gallinera

The lush Gallinera Valley has been cultivated since Arabic times, and the hillsides are still lined with tidy stone terraces full of dusky olive groves and fruit orchards. The valley is scattered with tiny, ancient villages, their Arabic origins echoed in their names – Alcalà, Benimantell, Benitaya – and reflected in the maze of crooked streets at their heart (*see also p42*). Map F2



Orange groves outside Denia

4 Denia (Dénia)

Now a popular family resort, Denia was once a substantial Roman settlement. There's a lofty castle, and a charming old quarter huddled around the port, but Denia's most popular attractions are still its lengthy beaches: the long, family-friendly sands to the north, and a pretty, cove-pocked stretch called Les Rotes to the south (*see p40*). The strange, bald peak of Montgó looms above the town, perfect for hiking and picnicking (*see pp36, 42*). Map H2

5 Xàbia (Jávea)

Xàbia's bay is perfectly caught between two dramatic capes: the Cap de Sant Antoni and the Cap de la Nau (*see pp36, 75*). The old village of Xàbia, a whitewashed huddle of impossibly narrow streets around a fortified medieval

church (*see p53*), is set back from the lively modern resort which has grown up around the bay. Map H3



Guadalest

**6 Penyal d'Ifac
(Peñón d'Ifach)**

This huge, jagged rock emerges dramatically from the sea and dominates the entire bay at Calp (Calpe). A protected Natural Park, it is home to over 300 species of flora. Connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, and impossibly sheer, for centuries it was the perfect hideout for pirates. Now it provides the perfect challenge for rock-climbers and, thanks to a tunnel bored through the rock early in the last century, there's also a less arduous (though still demanding) hiking route to the top (*see pp16–17*). 📍 *Map G4*

7 Guadalest

Perched high on a crag in a sea of mountain peaks, the little whitewashed village of Guadalest is huddled under the ruins of an ancient castle. Once it was a

The Lovelorn Giant

There's a curious notch "missing" from the spiky mountains behind Benidorm. According to legend, it was torn out and tossed into the bay by a despairing giant who had been told that his beloved would die by the time the sun set. In so doing he gave her a few moments more of life; the rock became the Isla de Benidorm (*see p36*).

strategic military outpost, but it lost its importance after earthquakes devastated the region and irreparably damaged the castle. Thanks to its stunning location and the picturesque charm of its old-fashioned lanes and squares, Guadalest is now the most visited village in Spain. Quirky museums, cafés and souvenir shops have sprung up, but although tour buses disgorge an endless stream of visitors in summer, Guadalest has hung onto its medieval tranquility and charm. 📍 *Map F3*

**8 Parc de l'Aigüera,
Benidorm**

In a town best known until now for cheap sun, sea and sand (*see p38*), the Parc de l'Aigüera is a landmark new development. Designed by prestigious Catalan architect Ricardo Bofill, this vast, urban park spreads north of the old village of Benidorm. It draws on Classical influences, with an elegant avenue bordered by a stepped terrace decorated with vast urns. This culminates in a circular outdoor amphitheatre, surrounded, Roman-style, with stepped seating. Concerts take place here during the summer months, but it's always a quiet place for a stroll, a world away from the bedlam on the beachfront. 📍 *Map G4*



9 Callosa d'en Sarrià and Fonts d'Algar

The most interesting thing about the modest little village of Callosa d'en Sarrià is actually just outside of it. In a pretty, orchard-filled valley (from Callosa take the road to Tárberna and follow the signs) are the Fonts d'Algar, a lovely cascade of waterfalls and natural swimming pools set among shady forest (*see pp36, 42*). Several excellent walking trails lead from here to the Sierra de Bernia (*see p43*).  Map G3

10 Villena

The large, prosperous town of Villena is crowned by a story-book castle, complete with hefty, crenellated walls and watch-towers. At its feet lies a chaotic sprawl of tile-roofed houses, the heart of the medieval village. The central Plaza de Santiago is surrounded by handsome 16th-century palaces and the graceful Renaissance church of Santa María, which bears a flamboyant Baroque façade. The finest palace on this square is now the town hall, home to an archaeology museum which contains the sumptuous Tesoro de Villena, a spectacular hoard of Bronze Age gold discovered by chance in the 1960s (*see p54*).

 Map C4

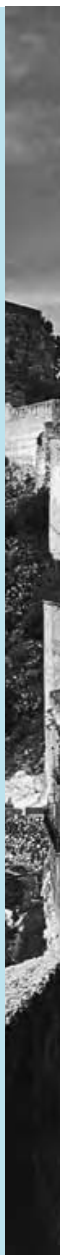


Tesoro de Villena (Villena Treasure)

A Morning in Xàtiva

 This walk is best done on a Thursday, when the market is held. A **castle** has sat on the lofty promontory above the historic town of Xàtiva since Iberian times. Start your morning – before the sun gets too hot – with the stiff climb up to the castle (signposted “castell”), or take the easy option of the little tourist train which runs from outside the tourist office. From the castle ramparts, the lovely old city unfolds at your feet, surrounded by endless sierras. One of the finest and most complete castles in the region, this is a sublime setting for a music festival held every August.

 On the way down, you can stop for refreshment in the gardens of the charming **Hostería de Mont Sant** (*see p124*). When you reach the main town, continue down Calle las Santas and turn right onto Calle Roca for the **Museo de l'Almudí** (*see p55*), with an excellent collection of archeological finds and paintings (including some by Xàtiva-born artist José de Ribera). If you are here on market day, head down to the nearby **Plaza del Mercado**, where stalls selling everything from fresh produce to pots and pans are set out under ancient arcades. Walk up to the Calle Corretgeria and visit the huge **Colegiata de Santa María** (*see p53*), still unfinished after more than 400 years. Opposite the basilica is the beautiful **Hospital Real** (now local administration offices), with a dazzling, exquisitely sculpted Gothic façade. For lunch, try the traditional **Casa La Abuela** (C/Reina 17; 962 28 10 85).





Left **Ceramics in Altea** Right **Wickerwork in Gata de Gorgos**

Top 10 Shopping Towns

1 Altea
The pretty village of Altea (see pp38, 63) was “discovered” by artists during the 1960s and ’70s, and is filled with galleries and craft shops selling everything from watercolours to pottery and hand-made jewellery. Map G4

2 Xixona (Jijona)
Xixona (see p48) is the biggest producer of the delicious Spanish nougat (*turrón*), which is traditionally eaten at Christmas but is available all year round at countless local shops. Map E4

3 Ibi
Ibi’s long toy-making tradition is sadly now being supplanted by cheap plastics, but you can still pick up pretty replicas of old-fashioned tin toys at the delightful Museu Valencià del Joguet (see p55). Map E4

4 Gata de Gorgos
The little inland village of Gata de Gorgos is crammed with shops devoted to traditional wicker and straw crafts, from garden furniture to straw baskets and wonderful floppy hats. Map G3

5 Ontinyent
The delightful mountain town of Ontinyent has been producing textiles since Arabic times, and its high-quality wool blankets are exported all around the world. There are numerous factory outlets offering excellent bargains. Map E2

6 Calp (Calpe)
Fish auctions are common in all the fishing villages of the Costa Blanca, but Calp’s futuristic computer screens and rapid bidding make it every bit as exciting as the stock exchange (see also p38). Map G3

7 La Vila Joiosa (Villajoyosa)
La Vila Joiosa (see pp38, 63) has been making chocolate since the 17th century. You can buy the perfect souvenir at the famous Valor chocolate factory on the outskirts of town. Map F4

8 Alcoi (Alcoy)
Alcoi (see pp48, 50) is famous in the region for traditional sweets first introduced by the Arabs. Most cake shops sell sugared almonds and the tasty sugar-coated pine nuts called *peladillas*. Map E3

9 Benidorm
Brash, brazen Benidorm (see pp38, 40) is the place to go if you’re looking for kitsch souvenirs. It’s also a great place to find cheap t-shirts and a huge variety of beachwear to suit all tastes and budgets. Map G4

10 Guadalest
Guadalest (see pp14–15) is packed with souvenir shops, offering delicate, handmade lace tablecloths, woollen blankets, slippers and traditional capes. You’ll also find a good range of local produce, from liqueurs to honey. Map F3





Left Barranc del Encanta Right Cap de la Nau

10 Views and Picnic Spots

1 Barranc del Encanta
The track for the Barranc del Encanta is signposted just before Planes. It twists crazily down to the “Enchanted Ravine”, a perfect picnic spot, where a waterfall tumbles into a natural swimming pool. 📍 Map F3

2 Adzubieta
The romantic dry-stone ruins of this ancient Arabic village close to Alcalà de la Jovada in the Vall de Gallinera are great for picnics. A stiff path leads to the rocky peak of La Fordada for fantastic views. 📍 Map F3

3 Peak of Montgó
If you take the long but not too arduous trail through Montgó Natural Park (see p36) to the top of the mountain, you will be rewarded with gorgeous views over the scrubland and rugged cliff. 📍 Map H2

4 Cap de Sant Antoni
The lighthouse at the tip of the windy Cape of Sant Antoni affords gorgeous views over wave-battered cliffs and the pretty resort of Xàbia (Jávea) curled around the bay. 📍 Map H2

5 Cap de la Nau (Cabo de la Nao)
Rounding off the southern end of the bay at Xàbia, the Cap de la Nau (see p36) is dotted with well-marked *miradors* (viewing points). The Portitxol *mirador* is especially lovely. 📍 Map H3

6 Embalse de Guadalest
This huge, deep blue reservoir at the foot of the valley overlooked by the picturesque village of Guadalest is a wonderful place to stop for a picnic after a hard morning’s sightseeing. 📍 Map F3

7 Ermita de la Mare de Déu
This hermitage is set in the wonderful Natural Park of Font Roja (see p36), with shady paths through the woodland and plenty of picnic spots to choose from. 📍 Map E3

8 Jardín de Santos, Penáguila
These immaculate 19th-century gardens in pine woods on the edge of the dreamy mountain village of Penáguila are the idyllic setting for a popular barbecue area with picnic tables. 📍 Map F3

9 Xàtiva (Játiva) Castle
Xàtiva’s lofty castle offers beautiful views over the tranquil mountain town, with its tiled rooftops and slender spires, and out across endless mountains fading into the distance. 📍 Map E1

10 Penyal d’Ifac (Peñon d’Ifach) summit mirador
The *mirador* at the summit of the Penyal d’Ifac (see pp16–17) is the ultimate viewing point – but you’ll have to work to get there, as it’s a stiff and slippery 45-minute climb from the base. 📍 Map G4



KM Disco Garden

Top 10 Benidorm Nightlife

1 Lennon's

Lennon's is a big favourite with the under-25s, and the dance floor (playing high-energy dance music) is always heaving at weekends. ☎ *C/Mallorca • Map G4*

2 Churchill's

A favourite with the Brits, this brash, raucous pub hosts legendary karaoke nights which pack in the punters, plus theme nights and lots of competitions. Tacky but fun, in true Benidorm style. ☎ *C/Mallorca • Map G4*

3 Penélope Beach Club

The beachfront outpost of the mega-club Penélope (see p60), this is an elegant bar-cum-club, where you can sip a cocktail and watch the crowds flow along the seafront. The action starts late, when the music hots up and the go-gos get going.

4 KM Disco Garden

One of several mega-clubs on the Carretera Alicante-Valencia (others include Pachá, Manssion and Penélope), KM has room for 5,000 people. The laser shows are spectacular (see p60).

5 Home of Blues

This classic rock bar has live concerts on Friday and Saturday nights, featuring jazz, blues and old-fashioned rock'n'roll. It's right on the seafront in the old town. ☎ *Avda Virgen del Sufragio 2 • Map G4 • 965 86 33 60*

6 Benidorm Palace

Come here for the biggest, flashiest and most extravagant shows in town, with acrobats, cabaret singers and the famous show girls. You can dine as you watch, or just have a drink. ☎ *Avda Severo Ochoa s/n • Map G4 • 965 85 16 60*

7 Sunset

The friendly Sunset bar has a relaxed lounge area with sofas, plus a small dance floor playing mainly Spanish pop from the 1980s onward for a slightly older, calmer crowd. ☎ *C/Lepanto 1 • Map G4 • 965 85 21 03*

8 Sinatra's

This celebrated cocktail bar features regular cabaret acts and other live performances (usually in winter), and attracts a more mature clientele. ☎ *C/Mallorca • Map G4 • 966 80 73 80*

9 Underground

Underground hosts regular live gigs featuring local and up-and-coming bands, plus great jam sessions. At weekends, top DJs spin an eclectic mix of dance music. ☎ *Avda del Mediterráneo 58 • Map G4 • 966 88 90 66*

10 Zanzibar

Benidorm has a buzzing gay scene, and the Calle Santa Faz is packed with gay and gay-friendly bars and clubs. Zanzibar has a friendly, mixed crowd, and there are nightly drag shows. ☎ *C/Santa Faz 7 • Map G4 • 965 86 78 07*





Tiffany's

10 Benidorm Cafés and Restaurants

Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

1 Tiffany's

Still one of the smartest places to dine in Benidorm, with French-influenced Mediterranean cuisine, an exceptional wine list, and an international clientele. ☎ *Avda del Mediterráneo 51 • Map G4 • 965 85 16 80 • D only • €€€€*

2 I Fratelli

Classic Italian cuisine adapted for the taste buds of northern European guests is what's on the menu at this popular restaurant with Art Deco-inspired decor. ☎ *Avda Llorca 2 • Map G4 • 965 85 39 79 • Closed Wed in winter, Nov • €€*

3 La Palmera

Traditional – and wonderfully fresh – seafood is the speciality at this welcoming restaurant. There's a flower-filled terrace for hot summer nights. ☎ *Avda de Severo Ochoa s/n • Map G4 • 965 85 32 82 • Closed Sun D, Mon • €€*

4 Easo Berri

All kinds of delicacies from the Basque lands are on offer at this upmarket tapas bar, including excellent shellfish, best washed down with a typically crisp Basque white wine. ☎ *C/Santo Domingo • Map G4 • 965 86 43 50 • €€*

5 Casa Toni

This smart restaurant serves impeccable local rice and seafood dishes, but it's the tapas bar which really pulls in the crowds. ☎ *Avda Cuenca, Edificio Gemelo 4 • Map G4 • 966 80 12 32 • Closed Sun D • €€€*

6 La Cava Aragonesa

There are dozens of tapas bars along the Calle Santo Domingo. This one serves a huge range and is incredibly popular as a result, so expect to find standing room only. ☎ *C/Santo Domingo • Map G4 • 966 80 12 06 • €€*

7 L'Albufera

L'Albufera covers all bases with lots of tapas plus an array of excellent local rice dishes. It offers a good value fixed-price menu at lunchtimes, and, unusually, in the evenings too. ☎ *C/Girona 3 • Map G4 • 965 86 56 61 • €€*

8 Aitona

One of the best places to try an authentic *paella*, this brightly lit eatery is a favourite with locals and tourists alike. It also serves tasty, simply grilled local meat. ☎ *C/Ruzafa 2 • Map G4 • 965 85 30 10 • €€*

9 La Rana

A popular tapas bar in the old quarter, with a wide variety of delicious tapas to sample. Wash down with a robust local wine. ☎ *Costera del Barco s/n • Map G4 • 965 86 81 20 • Closed Sun • €*

10 Ulía

Always busy thanks to its perfect seafront location, Ulía serves up simply prepared fresh fish and authentic local rice dishes like *arroz a la banda* on its breezy terrace. ☎ *Paseo Marítimo s/n, La Cala • Map G4 • 986 85 68 28 • €€€*





La Plaza

TOT 10 Nightlife

1 La Plaza, Altea

Live jazz, blues and soul are on the programme at this mellow cocktail bar on the prettiest square in the village. ☎ *Plaza de la Iglesia 12* • Map G4 • 965 84 26 30

2 Pitius, Denia (Dénia)

This colourful, friendly bar is popular with locals of all ages. Resident DJs raise the tempo at weekends, when it packs out. There are special theme nights throughout the summer. ☎ *Ctra las Marinas s/n* • Map H2 • 965 78 20 23

3 Café de la Posada, Denia

This fashionable watering hole is attached to a stylish hotel (see p126). Mellow music, a laid-back clientele and excellent snacks make it refreshingly different from your average raucous seaside bar. ☎ *Plaza Drassanes 2* • Map H2 • 966 43 29 66

4 Bacarra, Gandia (Gandía)

Bacarra's "disco-garden" is the place to be during the hot summer months. There are all kinds of events, from DJs to live gigs, go-go dancers and special one-off theme parties. ☎ *C/Legazpi 7* • Map F2 • 962 84 58 25

5 Molí Blanc, Xàbia (Jávea)

A classic in Xàbia, this club is always packed out on summer weekends. Resident and guest DJs play house, techno and a bit of Spanish pop to get the crowd going. ☎ *Ctra Cabo de la Nau* • Map H3 • 965 79 05 07

6 L'Hellín, Xàbia

Popular with tourists and locals alike, this pretty café-bar sits right on the pebbly beach. Dine on simple Mediterranean dishes, or just enjoy a cocktail out on the terrace. ☎ *Avda Mediterráneo 186* • Map H3 • 965 79 13 79

7 Albades, Alcoi (Alcoy)

This huge discoteca has four spaces: "La Discoteca" for the latest dance music; "Dream" for techno and house; "Happy" for pop music; and "La Terraza" for ambient sounds. ☎ *Ctra Nacional 340 s/n* • Map E3 • 966 51 64 02

8 Olé, Xàbia

This taverna is more than a tapas bar. Housed in a handsome 19th-century mansion, there are always temporary art exhibitions, and live music (usually jazz or blues) is a permanent fixture during the summer months. ☎ *C/San Buenaventura 9* • Map H3 • 966 46 23 76

9 La Llum, Xàbia

House and techno keep the party going until dawn at La Llum, another of Xàbia's popular discos. ☎ *Carrer de Gual 1* • Map H3

10 Palau Altea, Altea

Altea's main cultural centre features regular performances of opera, *zarzuela* (typical Spanish operetta), theatre dance and classical music, as well as jazz, flamenco and pop concerts. ☎ *C/Alcoi s/n* • Map G4 • 966 88 19 24





La Capella

TOP 10 Places to Eat

Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

1 Girasol, Moraira
One of the best restaurants in Spain, Girasol has a romantic setting in the hills above Moraira (see p66).

2 El Poblet, Denia (Dénia)
Try fresh seafood (including Denia's famous prawns) and local rice dishes, imaginatively prepared at this excellent restaurant (see p66).

3 L'Escaleta, Cocentaina
This elegant chalet at the foot of the mountains serves elaborate regional cuisine – succulent lamb, exquisitely fresh fish, heavenly desserts. There are beautiful mountain views from the terrace.
☎ Subida Estación Norte • Map E3 • 965 59 21 00 • Closed Sun D, Mon, 2nd 2 weeks Jan, Easter wk • €€€

4 Restaurante Mistral, Oliva
This charming traditional restaurant, with beautiful views of the surrounding orange groves, serves grilled fish and meat dishes but specializes in *paellas* and other rice dishes. ☎ Partida Elca s/n • Map G2 • 962 85 53 49 • Closed Mon, Sun D, L Tue–Thu; closed L in summer • €€€

5 La Bohème, Xàbia (Jávea)
The selection of fresh tapas is written up on a blackboard each day at this popular seaside spot; there's also a range of seafood and simple meat dishes to choose from. ☎ Paseo Amanecer • Map H3 • 965 79 16 00 • €€

6 La Capella, Altea
Dine under vine-draped arches on the terrace of this charming restaurant. There are good traditional dishes, as well as a selection of tapas at the popular bar. ☎ C/San Pablo 1 • Map G4 • 966 68 04 84 • €€€

7 Warynessy, Villena
Sleepy Villena is an unlikely setting for this sleek minimalist bar and restaurant, which serves modern versions of traditional Alicante recipes, and wonderful desserts. ☎ C/Isabel la Católica 13 • Map C4 • 965 80 10 47 • Closed Mon • €€

8 Hostería de Mont Sant, Xàtiva (Játiva)
This excellent restaurant serves traditional regional dishes on a pretty garden terrace (see p66).

9 El Viscayo, Castalla
This friendly country eatery makes its own *embutidos* (see p64), and is famous for its delectable *gazpachos*, a shepherd's dish made with meat and game, and served with flatbread. ☎ Camino la Bola • Map D4 • 965 56 01 96 • Closed Sat L • €€

10 Ca L'Ángeles, Polop
This welcoming restaurant set in an old house in the pretty medieval village of Polop serves fresh fish and authentic local dishes like lamb with roasted garlic. ☎ C/Gabriel Miró • Map G4 • 965 87 02 26 • Sep–Jun: closed Tue; Jul–Aug: closed Sun D • €









Left Isla Tabarca Right Dunas de Guardamar

Southern Costa Blanca

ALICANTE (ALACANT), CAPITAL OF THE COSTA BLANCA, *boasts an enticing old quarter piled chaotically around the lower slopes of a vast cliff, where a magnificent fortress has stood guard for 1,000 years. Modern avenues are packed with fantastic shopping, and the tapeo (a bar crawl between tapas bars) is an institution. Inland, parched plains give way to mountains riddled with caves and scattered with medieval villages and ancient castles, which recall the region's position on the front line between the Arabic and Christian worlds during the Middle Ages. The modest town of Novelda is the unexpected setting for an architectural gem from the more recent past. Along the coastline, long, sandy beaches make up for the lack of dramatic scenery, and you can escape the crowds on the lovely island of Tabarca. Heading south, the elegant town of Elx (Elche) is surrounded by ancient palm groves first established by the Phoenicians, and Orihuela's affluent and aristocratic history is recalled by a beautiful ensemble of Gothic churches and Renaissance palaces.*



The beach at Santa Pola

10 Sights

- 1 Alicante (Alacant)
- 2 Santa Pola
- 3 Isla Tabarca
- 4 Elx (Elche)
- 5 Orihuela
- 6 Dunas de Guardamar
- 7 Torrevieja
- 8 Petrer (Petrer)
- 9 Cuevas de Canalobre
- 10 Novelda



1 Alicante (Alacant)

The main gateway to the Costa Blanca, the big, bustling city of Alicante is often overlooked in the charge to the beaches and resorts, yet this is one of Spain's most engaging cities, with a picturesque old quarter, a collection of beautiful churches and fascinating museums, and a lively port with plenty of bars and restaurants. The whole city is dominated by the splendid Castillo de Santa Bárbara, high on a cliff above the sea (*see pp10–13*). *Map E5*

2 Santa Pola

Santa Pola is a cheerful family resort set around a pretty port. At the heart of the village is a sturdy castle; built in the 16th century as a defence against pirates, it now houses a museum of the sea. The lighthouse at the tip of the Cape of Santa Pola offers gorgeous views of the coastline and out to the small island of Tabarca, a short ferry-ride away. The salt lakes on the fringes of the village are now a Natural Park, and attract hundreds of aquatic birds, including flamingoes. *Map E6, Q1*

3 Isla Tabarca

The island of Tabarca (*see pp24–5*), 2km (1 mile) long and 450 metres (492 yards) wide, sits just off the coast of Santa Pola. Wild, pebbly coves and delightful



Alicante's Ayuntamiento (town hall)

little bays pucker its shoreline, and the clear waters have been designated a marine reserve. In summer, regular ferries make the enjoyable short journey from Santa Pola or the slightly longer one from Alicante, but many tourists simply make for the seafood restaurants clustered around the port, leaving the little town and the furthest coves to more intrepid explorers. *Map E6*

4 Elx (Elche)

The immaculate town of Elx is best known for its celebrated palm groves, introduced by the Phoenicians more than two millennia ago, and in particular for the "Priest's Garden" (*see pp22–3*), a luxuriant botanical garden filled with palms and tropical flowers. Most of the town's historic sights are clustered around the vast *Basílica de Santa María*, the setting for the *Misteri d'Elx* (*see pp50, 52*). An important Iberian settlement, *Illici*, is still being excavated on the outskirts of Elx, and it is here that the famous *Dama de Elx*, the most accomplished Iberian sculpture in Spain, was discovered. *Map D6, Q1*



Cactus Garden, Hort del Cura, Elx



Torrevieja's promenade

5 Orihuela
Magnificent churches, monasteries and palaces attest to Orihuela's distinguished history. Set back from the coast in a fertile valley and surrounded by rolling sierras, this ancient capital of an Arabic *taifa* became an important centre of learning after the Reconquest (see p34), and the Catholic monarchs held court here before making the final push on the last Arabic kingdom of Granada. The narrow streets are lined with faded palaces and countless fine churches, including the graceful cathedral, the Colegio de Santo Domingo (see p52) and the utterly charming Iglesia de Santas Just y Rufina. 📍 Map P2

6 Dunas de Guardamar
This wild and lovely stretch of windswept dunes on the outskirts of the low-key tourist

Empress Sisi

The Imperial Palm in Elx's Hort del Cura is named in honour of the Empress Sisi of Austria (1837–98). She was the Princess Diana of her time, a beautiful and tortured figure who escaped the stifling responsibilities of court life by sailing around the Mediterranean, and indulging in bizarre beauty treatments, which included bathing in cow's milk.

enclave of Guardamar is a protected area, which has blocked the intrusion of the kind of high-rise developments that have blighted other parts of the coast. The dunes undulate along endless beaches of fine pale sand, backed by shady pine glades with walking paths, cycling routes and picnic areas. Although the beaches are very popular in summer, they remain relatively uncrowded. Nonetheless, the best time to visit is off-season, when you can go for long, bracing beach walks without a soul in sight. 📍 Map Q2

7 Torrevieja
This substantial resort town packed with villas and second homes has a lively seafront promenade and unusual rock pools in place of a beach. There's also a huge modern marina offering plentiful facilities for sailing and other watersports. There are ranks of bars and restaurants to choose from, but the gorgeous Modernista casino (see p48) is the ideal spot for a drink or a snack. On the fringes of the town sit two vast salt lakes, with gleaming pyramids of freshly formed salt – a designated nature reserve, which attracts several species of birds, both migratory and resident. 📍 Map Q3



8

Petrer (Petrel)

Medieval Petrer is dominated by its impressive castle (*see p47*). The old town has almost been swallowed by the adjacent (and unlovely) industrial city of Elda, which is squeezed right up to its borders. Both towns share a long shoe-making tradition, and Petrer's narrow streets are still home to traditional cobblers. There's a pretty Neo-Classical church and a pair of charming hermitages. Map D4

9

Cuevas de Canalobre

This vast cavern, which soars up for almost 140 m (460 ft), is the largest and most impressive of a network of caves which riddle the Cabecó d'Or mountain near Busot. It was probably first discovered by the Arabs, and has been put to all kinds of strange uses, including housing a factory for aeroplane engines during the Spanish Civil War (*see p58*).



Cuevas de Canalobre

10

Novelda

Sleepy Novelda rarely makes it onto tourist itineraries, but it should. This charming if rather dilapidated little country town boasts a cluster of fine Modernista mansions, of which the most impressive is the Casa-Museo Modernista (*see pp18–19*). On the edge of town, the castle of La Mola squats next to the Gaudí-inspired sanctuary of Mary Magdalene. Map D5

A Day in Two Cities

Morning



Allow a full day (Tue to Sat) for this tour of two elegant but very different cities. Begin in **Orihuela**, at the **tourist office**, housed in a splendid Baroque palace on Calle Francisco Die. Peek into the Gothic **church of Santiago** before doubling back to the delightful **church of Santas Just y Rufina**, with its unmistakable bell tower. The Calle Sant Just leads into the Calle Ramón y Cajal, lined with terrace cafés and shops, where the graceful **Catedral de San Salvador** overlooks a pretty square. Continue west to the vast **Colegio de Santo Domingo**, topped with a pastel tower seemingly made of icing sugar. Head back into the historic centre for lunch at **Casablanca** (C/Meca 1; 965 30 10 29), which serves delicious, hearty traditional stews.



Afternoon

Take the short drive along the A7 motorway to **Elx**, set in famous palm groves. Explore the **Hort del Cura** (*see pp22–3*), then stroll back to the historic heart of the town and the vast blue-domed **Basilica de Santa María**. Next to the basilica is a 13th-century watchtower, the **Torre de Calaforra**. You can learn more about the famous Misteri d'Elx, the last surviving medieval mystery play in Europe, at the nearby **Museo de la Festa** on Carrer Major de la Vila. Finish up with a well-earned drink on the terrace of the **Café Paris** (Plaza del Congreso Eucarístico) overlooking the cathedral.





Left **Dates** on market stall in Elx (Elche) Right **Monóvar**

Top 10 Shopping Towns

1 Agost

Agost's long ceramic-making tradition dates back for centuries, and dozens of shops sell the earthenware water jars (*botijos*) typical of the region, along with a range of ceramic items from pots to platters. 📍 *Map D5*

2 Alicante (Alacant)

The ultimate one-stop shopping destination, Alicante has the biggest department stores, plus plenty of large high-street chain shops, all lined up along the Avenida Maisonnave. 📍 *Map E5*

3 Elda

Elda is a big, industrial city, and one of the largest shoe-making centres in Spain. Numerous factory outlets on the outskirts of the town offer excellent shoe bargains. 📍 *Map D4*

4 El Pinós (Pinoso)

El Pinós is one of the best-known wine towns in the Alicante region (see p57), but it's also justly famous for its *embutidos* – cured hams and sausages made with locally reared livestock and prepared to traditional recipes. 📍 *Map C5*

5 Crevillent

Crevillent has dozens of workshops and factories offering the luxurious and colourful rugs and carpets for which it is renowned throughout Spain. Other local crafts include glassware and wickerwork. 📍 *Map D6*

6 Elx (Elche)

Come around Easter to see Elx's famous and elaborate palm crosses being made for the Easter Sunday parades (see pp22–23). At any time of year, dozens of shops sell fresh dates and delicious date sweets and cakes. 📍 *Map D6, Q1*

7 Santa Pola

Santa Pola's traditional souvenirs are objects made from seashells – a fashion which you may have thought died out in the 1970s. These run the gamut from the kitsch to the surprisingly pretty. 📍 *Map E6, Q1*

8 Torrevieja

Torrevieja is edged with two enormous salt lakes, and its pale pyramids of gleaming salt make a curious sight. In town, souvenir shops sell unusual carved boats made entirely from salt. 📍 *Map Q3*

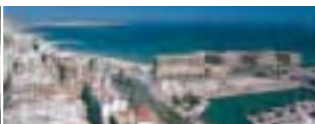
9 Novelda

Novelda (see pp18–19, 85) is most famous for its marble, but if that proves difficult to pack, you could pick up some locally grown golden saffron to flavour your own *paellas* (see p62) instead. 📍 *Map D5*

10 Monóvar

The cheerful wine town of Monóvar (see p56) produces an excellent, robust red wine, as well as rosés, but it is best known for the wonderful dessert wine El Fondillón. 📍 *Map D5*





Left Picnic, Castillo de Santa Bárbara, Alicante Right View from the Tryp Gran Sol, Alicante

10 Views and Picnic Spots

1 Petrer (Petrel) Castle

The most impressive of a line of castles which cuts through the middle of the Alicante region, the sturdy fortifications of Petrer Castle make for a perfect picnic – and, indeed, picture – spot with endless views. Map D4

2 Tibi Reservoir

This remote reservoir near the village of Tibi is formed by the oldest working dam in Europe, built at the end of the 16th century, and perfectly slotted into a narrow gorge.

Map E4

3 Castillo de Santa Bárbara, Alicante (Alacant)

Alicante's spectacular hilltop castle (see pp10–11) dominates the whole city, and its ramparts and terraces offer endless views over the deep blue Mediterranean.

Map V2

4 Dunas de Guardamar

The protected expanse of undulating dunes (see p41) backed by a gnarled pine forest on the edge of Guardamar de Segura makes a delightful place for a picnic. Map Q2

5 Isla Tabarca

The secluded coves at the western end of this pretty island (see pp24–5) are perfect for picnics. If you need to work up an appetite, you can always go swimming or snorkelling first.

Map E6, R1

6 Parque Municipal, Elx (Elche)

This delightful palm-shaded park with ceramic-tiled benches is right in the heart of town. The children's play areas make it perfect for family picnics. Map D6, Q1

7 Castillo de la Mola, Novelda

This lofty castle, squeezed up against an extraordinary Modernista sanctuary (see p47), offers far-reaching views across endless plains and a strange lunar landscape of abruptly jutting peaks. Map D5

8 Faro de Santa Pola

Santa Pola's lighthouse, right out at the tip of the cape, is a wonderful place to come at dusk, with views out across the cliffs to the diminutive island of Tabarca. Map E6, Q1

9 Tryp Gran Sol, Alicante

The panoramic restaurant on the 26th floor of the Tryp Gran Sol Hotel in Alicante serves good regional dishes against the fabulous backdrop of the yacht-filled port and the sea. Rambla de Méndez Núñez 3 • Map U3

10 El Palmeral, Orihuela

After a busy morning's sightseeing around the historic city of Orihuela (see p84), the delightful and extensive palm grove on the edge of town makes a refreshing change and is perfect for picnics. Map P2

Left **Turrónes Tecló** Right **Mango**

Top 10 Alicante Shops

1 El Corte Inglés
Alicante has two branches of El Corte Inglés, Spain's biggest department store. The groceries are excellent, if expensive. ☎ *Avda Maisonnave 53 • Map T3 • 965 92 50 01*

2 Zara
Zara, one of the best-known Spanish chains, offers catwalk fashions at affordable prices. Men, children and babies are also catered for, and there's a new line of stylish things for the home. ☎ *Avda Maisonnave 42-44 • Map T3 • 965 92 37 45*

3 Mango
This well-known Spanish chain has stylish clothes, shoes and accessories for women, with everything from fashionable suits for the office to jeans and funky clubwear. ☎ *Avda Maisonnave 33-39 • Map S3 • 965 12 54 87*

4 Librería Internacional
Whether you are looking for some holiday reading, something to help you brush up your Spanish, or good maps of the region, the friendly staff at this bookshop will be able to help you. ☎ *C/Rafael Altamira 6 • Map U3 • 965 21 79 25*

5 Turrónes Tecló
This delightful, old-fashioned shop on the main street of the old quarter sells different varieties of the delicious local nougat, *turrón*, which makes a great gift for the sweet-toothed. ☎ *C/Mayor 23 • Map U2 • 965 20 11 15*

6 Damas
Damas is stuck in a 1970s time warp, but it still makes the best traditional cakes and pastries in town. You can eat in, in the chocolate-brown café, or take away. ☎ *C/Pintor Lorenzo Casanova 5 • Map T3 • 965 12 14 71*

7 Enoteca Bernadino
Choose from over 2,500 wines, including an excellent regional Spanish selection, as well as imported wines from France, Chile and Argentina. ☎ *C/Alberola 38 • Map E5 • 965 28 08 73*

8 Explanada Street Market
Canopied white stalls line Alicante's famous promenade, selling jewellery, ceramics, beachwear and more besides. Many open during the day, but the market is liveliest on summer evenings. ☎ *Map U3*

9 Mercado Central
This delightful Modernista market is surrounded by colourful stalls selling fresh flowers. Inside, you'll find fabulous heaps of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat. It's a great place for picnic supplies. ☎ *Avda Alfonso X el Sabio • Map T2*

10 Tardor
This charming flower shop creates beautiful bouquets, but it also sells attractive gifts for the home and garden – vases, glassware, plant pots and other ceramics. ☎ *C/Manuel Antón 12 • Map T2 • 965 14 34 85*





Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

Restaurante Ibéricos

10 Alicante Tapas Bars

1 Nou Manolín

Upstairs is one of the best restaurants in Alicante (see p91). Downstairs, the exceptional range and quality of the tapas means it's usually standing room only at the bar. ☎ C/Villegas 3 • Map U2 • 965 20 03 68 • Restaurant: €€€; tapas bar: €€

2 La Taberna del Gourmet

This atmospheric tapas bar on a lively street is permanently packed. It serves a great array of fresh tapas, accompanied by an excellent wine list featuring lots of good local wines. ☎ C/San Fernando 10 • Map T3 • 965 204 233 • €€

3 Restaurante Ibéricos

The dangling hams signal this restaurant's speciality. A whole section of the menu is dedicated to ham, but there are plenty of other dishes to choose from. ☎ C/Gerona 5 • Map U3 • 965 21 30 08 • €€

4 Guillermo

This sweet, tile-lined little tapas bar is a neighbourhood favourite, serving tasty, traditional tapas and a refreshingly crisp local white wine. ☎ C/Velázquez 21 • Map T2 • 965 20 01 84 • Closed Sun • €

5 Rincón Gallego

Seafood is the speciality here, cooked to traditional Galician recipes. It's a cosy spot, with a permanent knot of locals at the bar. ☎ Plaza de Ayuntamiento s/n • Map U2 • 965 14 00 14 • Closed Mon • €

6 Govana

Join the locals at the busy bar for great tapas, or sit down in the traditional dining room and dine on tasty regional rice dishes. ☎ Plaza Dr Gómez Ulla 4 • Map S3 • 965 21 82 50 • Closed Sun D • €€

7 Mesón del Labrador

Complete with colourfully tiled walls and a stack of wine barrels, this classic tapas bar in the heart of the old quarter serves an extensive menu of traditional tapas. ☎ C/Labradores 19 • Map U2 • 965 20 48 46 • Closed L • €

8 Buen Comer

This long-established café-bar in the old quarter serves good tapas and *raciones* downstairs; upstairs, there's a fancier restaurant, with delicious seafood and rice dishes. ☎ C/Mayor 8 • Map U2 • 965 21 31 03 • €–€€

9 Mesón Rias Baixas

This family-run bar and restaurant is always packed to the rafters. The tapas are some of the best in town. Try the melt-in-the-mouth octopus cooked Galician-style. ☎ C/Pablo Iglesias 15 • Map T2 • 965 20 37 69 • €

10 Taverna del Labradores

There's almost no room in this miniature bar in the buzzy old quarter, but you can eat your tapas out on the terrace and watch the world go by. ☎ C/San Pascual 13 • Map U2 • no tel • Closed L daily, Tue • €



Many restaurants also have tapas bars – for example, Piripi (see p67).



Left **Pachà discoteca** Middle **Celestial Copas** Right **Casino de Torrevieja**

10 Nightlife

1 4Gats, Alicante (Alacant)

This excellent jazz bar, with live performances, poetry readings, *tertúlias* (discussion groups) and temporary art exhibitions, is a great place to relax in the evenings. ☎ C/García Morato 4 • Map T2 • no tel

2 Celestial Copas, Alicante

Possibly the most eccentric bar in Alicante, Celestial Copas has a wacky, enjoyably kitsch decor. Flamenco, rumba and *sevillanas* for an older crowd. ☎ C/San Pascual 1 • Map U2 • no tel

3 El Caribe, Alicante

A big favourite with the local Latino community, El Caribe is a huge and popular *salsateca*. Learn the moves at the free *salsa* and *merengue* classes (see p60).

4 Z Klub, Alicante

This big, slick disco just off the lively Calle San Fernando is currently one of the most fashionable in Alicante (as the admission price of €10 reflects). An enthusiastic crowd dances to the latest house and techno tunes. ☎ C/Coloma 3 • Map U3 • 965 98 01 36 or 617 67 52 51

5 Tablao Zambra, Alicante

A genuine corner of Andalucía on the Costa Blanca, the Tablao Zambra in El Campelló (a few miles up the coast from Alicante) features flamenco music and dance by gifted Andalusian performers (see p60).

6 Pachá, Torrevieja

There's an outpost of Pachá in almost every party town on the Med; this one attracts Spanish and international DJs, who keep the lively young crowd dancing until dawn (see p60).

7 Bowling Elche, Elx (Elche)

For a family night out, try this big bowling alley, which has a café and an amusement arcade with slot machines to go with the ranks of bowling lanes. ☎ C/Murcia 1 • Map D6, Q1 • 966 61 03 71

8 Casino de Torrevieja

Torrevieja's splendid Modernista casino (see p48) has all the usual games, but it's certainly the most atmospheric place to gamble away your holiday money. Dress fairly smartly (no shorts), and don't forget your passport.

9 Camelot, Santa Pola

This beachside club with an outdoor dance area is a classic on the summer nightclub scene. Spanish pop is interspersed with house and techno. ☎ Gran Playa • Map E6, Q1 • no tel

10 Blue Room, Alicante

This sophisticated bar in Alicante's Hotel Melia offers perfectly mixed cocktails in a formal yet comfortable setting. Sink into an armchair and sip your drink as the resident jazz pianist tinkles away. ☎ Plaza Puerta del Mar 6 • Map V3 • 965 20 50 00





La Sirena

TOP 10 Places to Eat

Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

1 Piripi, Alicante (Alacant)
One of Alicante's finest restaurants, this is probably the best place to try the local rice dishes. The tapas bar is one of the best in town (see p67).

2 Nou Manolín, Alicante
Excellent rice dishes (including a spectacular *arroz a la banda*) are on offer at this welcoming restaurant, with an elegant whitewashed dining room upstairs and a fantastic tapas bar downstairs (see p89).

3 La Sirena, Petrer (Petrel)
Its elegant decor and magnificent regional cuisine have made La Sirena one of the top restaurants in the Costa Blanca. There's an affordable lunchtime *menú del día*. ☎ *Avda de Madrid 14 • Map D4 • 965 37 17 18 • Closed Mon, Sun D, Easter wk, 3 wks Aug • €€€*

4 Los Barriles, Orihuela
This charming, rustically decorated tavern has been dishing up delicious seafood specialities for more than a century. ☎ *C/La Sal 1 • Map P2 • 966 74 23 65 • Closed Sun, Aug • €€*

5 Restaurante Parque Municipal, Elx (Elche)
This pretty, pavilion-style restaurant in the heart of Elx's palm grove serves traditional rice dishes and seafood. Try the *arroz con costra* – a meaty rice dish with baked eggs. ☎ *Parque Municipal, Paseo de l'Estación • Map D6 • 965 45 34 15 • €€*

6 Rincón de Pedro, Guardamar del Segura
This relaxed, family restaurant with a huge terrace is a favourite with locals and tourists alike. ☎ *C/Mediterraneo, Las Dunas • Map Q2 • 966 72 55 56 • Closed Mon in winter • €€*

7 La Almadraba, Isla Tabarca
Traditional restaurant with a pretty terrace overlooking the port. The menu offers plenty of local dishes, including *caldero tabarquino* (see p24). ☎ *Port • Map E6 • 965 97 05 87 • Closed D in winter • €€*

8 Batiste, Santa Pola
This big, airy seafood restaurant sits right on the port, so you know the fish is fresh. All kinds of shellfish are on the menu, along with tasty rice specialities. ☎ *Avda Fernando Pérez Ojeda 6 • Map E6 • 965 41 14 85 • €€€*

9 L'Alarich, Novelda
Traditional recipes are given a contemporary twist; try the sea bass with caramelized apple. ☎ *C/San Roque 22 • Map D5 • 965 60 75 82 • Closed Sun, Mon–Thu D • €€€€*

10 Xiri, Monóvar
Set in a fragrant, pine-shaded park, Xiri offers sophisticated Mediterranean cuisine, often with an unusual Oriental twist (as, for example, in the langoustine salad with sesame dressing). Finish up with one of their spectacular desserts. ☎ *Parque Alameda s/n • Map D5 • 965 47 29 10 • Closed Sun D, Mon, 3 wks from mid-Jun • €€€*





Left Islands of the Mar Menor Right Águilas

Costa Cálida

THE SUN SHINES, ON AVERAGE, FOR 300 DAYS OF THE YEAR on Murcia's "Warm Coast", which stretches from Europe's largest saltwater lagoon, the Mar Menor, down to the wild and rocky coastline around Águilas. If you're a watersports enthusiast, look no further than La Manga. But venture south and you'll find, among other delights, the Regional Park of Calblanque, one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline on the Mediterranean; the spectacular scenery of the Cabo Tiñoso; and Cartagena, the region's largest city, where Roman and Carthaginian ruins rub shoulders with Modernista mansions.



Calblanque

Top 10 Sights

- 1 Mar Menor
- 2 Santiago de la Ribera
- 3 Cabo de Palos
- 4 La Manga del Mar Menor
- 5 Calblanque
- 6 Cartagena
- 7 Puerto de Mazarrón
- 8 Ciudad Encantada de Bolnuevo
- 9 Parque Natural de Calnegre y Cabo Cope
- 10 Águilas



1 Mar Menor

The Mar Menor is the largest saltwater lagoon in Europe, with more than 70 km (43 miles) of coastline. Relatively shallow, with a maximum depth of 7 m (23 ft), it's always several degrees warmer than the nearby Mediterranean, and its high salt content makes it easier to float in. Rich in minerals, it has been reputed since Roman times to cure all kinds of ills. The sea is strewn with volcanic islands: Isla Barón is the largest, but pretty Isla Perdiguera is the focus of most boat trips – and a great place to try some freshly caught seafood. 📍 *Map P4*

2 Santiago de la Ribera

This plush, modern resort on the shores of the Mar Menor boasts an excellent marina and a long, palm-lined seafront promenade. Like so many resorts on the Mediterranean coast, this was once a humble fishing village, and a few colourful fishing boats are still drawn up on its sandy beaches. The tranquil waters of the Mar Menor are ideal for anyone learning to sail or windsurf, and there are excellent facilities for watersports. Ferries regularly sail for Isla Perdiguera. 📍 *Map P4*

3 Cabo de Palos

Inhabited since Roman times, Cabo de Palos sits right at the southernmost tip of the long spit



The port of Cabo de Palos

separating the Mar Menor from the Mediterranean. An imposing lighthouse offers spectacular views of both seas and the rocky coastline. Despite the influx of tourism, the village has hung onto its long fishing tradition, and trawlers rub shoulders with yachts and gin palaces in the harbour. You'll find plenty of good seafood restaurants here, but the star attraction is the proximity of the wild and beautiful Regional Park of Calblanque (see pp8–9). 📍 *Map Q5*

4 La Manga del Mar Menor

La Manga – “The Sleeve” – is the name given to the curious, long spit of land which divides the Mar Menor from the Mediterranean. The entire 21 km (13 miles) length is now densely packed with a virtually unbroken line of brash high-rise apartment buildings and hotels, a mini-Manhattan which is visible for miles around. Dedicated entirely to summer fun, the beaches are lined with bars, cafés and restaurants, and offer numerous opportunities for all kinds of watersports, including windsurfing, waterskiing, fishing and sailing. Regular ferries ply between La Manga and the islands of the Mar Menor. 📍 *Map Q4*



La Manga del Mar Menor





21st-century Cartagena

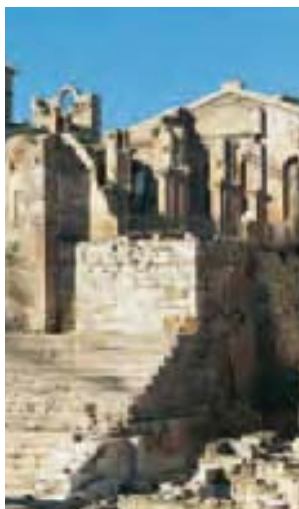
Until recently, Cartagena was a ghost town living on memories of its illustrious past. But a huge injection of cash has meant a spectacular flowering of glossy museums, glassy modern architecture, a spanking new marina, and a facelift for the once-neglected Roman ruins and florid Modernista buildings, like the opulent *Ayuntamiento* (city hall).

5 Calblanque

The Regional Park of Calblanque has the most beautiful stretch of coastline on the Costa Blanca, with crystal-clear waters perfect for snorkelling and diving. Behind the shore lie pine-clad mountains, with excellent walking and mountain-biking trails (see pp8–9).

6 Cartagena

Founded by the Carthaginians in the 3rd century BC, resettled by the Romans, and beloved by the Arabs, Cartagena has had a



Roman ruins, Cartagena

long, dramatic history. The old town is peppered with Roman ruins and overlooked by a hilltop castle, which offers panoramic views over the sprawling city and out to sea. The Calle Mayor is still lined with flamboyant Modernista mansions, the legacy of a 19th-century boom. The city's long naval history is recounted in the fascinating Museo Nacional de Arqueología Marítima (see p55). 📍 Map P5

7 Puerto de Mazarrón

The modest resort of Puerto de Mazarrón, one of the most southerly on the Costa Cálida, is popular with Murcian families. An attractive fishing port and marina sit side by side at the foot of a jutting cape; around it spread low-key developments and long beaches of dark sand interspersed with rocky coves. The resort is linked to the village of Mazarrón, with a smattering of historic monuments, including the Modernista town hall and the pretty 16th-century church of San Andrés. 📍 Map M5

8 Ciudad Encantada de Bolnuevo

The little fishing village and tourist resort of Bolnuevo boasts a fine, dark sandy beach and a series of beautiful coves to its south, reached by a winding road which hugs the cliff. These secret coves are well off the beaten track, and as a result they are popular with naturists. Behind the main beach is the Ciudad Encantada, an “enchanted city” of bizarre rock formations eroded by the wind and sea into extraordinary shapes. You can enter this strange, pale city and watch the rocks melt magically into faces, cathedrals or animals as you pass between them. 📍 Map M5



9 Parque Natural de Calnegre y Cabo Cope

As you progress to the southernmost tip of Murcia's Costa Cálida, the terrain becomes increasingly wild and rocky. This hauntingly lovely cape is now a protected Natural Park, and home to all kinds of birds and animals, including wild boar, sea turtles, cormorants and peregrine falcons. Footpaths are traced through the scrub, and you can climb up to the summit of the cape for stunning views of the sheer cliffs and the wheeling seabirds. In the lee of the cape is a dramatic stretch of rocky inlets and coves, perfect for a dip, overlooked by a 16th-century watchtower built to defend the coast from pirates. Map L6



Parque Natural de Calnegre y Cabo Cope

10 Águilas

Nudged up against the border with Andalucía, this quiet resort curls around a broad sandy bay, with spectacular rocky capes at either end and a scattering of volcanic islands rising abruptly from the sea. The delightful port sits at the foot of a steep cliff at the southern end of the bay; it's full of working fishing boats, which supply delicious fresh fish to the local restaurants. The Castle of San José, beautifully flood-lit at night, looms dramatically from the clifftop. In February, the town hosts one of the biggest carnivals in Spain. Map L6

A Drive on the Costa Cálida

Morning

Start the day with coffee at one of the beachfront bars on the promenade at **Águilas**, then head 3 km (2 miles) north out of the town, past the pretty harbour of Calabardine, to **Cabo Cope**. Climb the 16th-century watchtower, and splash about in the rock pools along the beach.

Return toward Águilas, but take the signposted turning for Garrobillo. The road twists along the mountainous fringes of the Natural Park, providing startling glimpses of the sea. It becomes even more dramatic once you reach Garrobillo, when the road narrows further and zig-zags furiously toward Humberías. When it joins the N332, turn left and stop for lunch at the fantastic roadside **Bar Surtidor** (Ctra Mazarrón-Águilas Km 15, just before the turning for Cañada de Gallego), a classic country café with a spectacular array of tapas.

Afternoon

Continue past vast tomato greenhouses toward Mazarrón. As you approach the town, follow signs for the Gredas de Bolnuevo. The little resort of **Bolnuevo** is strung out along a fine, sandy beach, where you can have your second swim of the day. Behind it is the extraordinary "Enchanted City." If you really want to escape the crowds, explore the quiet coves south of town.

For dinner, head to the port in **Mazarrón** for delicious seafood at **El Puerto** (see p99).





Left Cabo de Palos Right Águilas

TOP 10 Lighthouses

1 La Manga
Almost at the tip of “the sleeve” (La Manga), this enormous lighthouse sits above the biggest marina on the Mar Menor, and looks out over the Mediterranean and a pair of miniature islands. 🗺 *Map Q5*

2 Cabo de Palos
The view from the huge lighthouse overlooking the fishing village of Cabo de Palos is very different depending on which way you face: on one side, you’ll see the Mediterranean crashing dramatically on the cliffs; on the other, the tranquil waters of the Mar Menor. 🗺 *Map Q5*

3 Cartagena
One of the biggest ports in Spain, Cartagena is spread around a huge natural bay. Its sturdy red-brick lighthouse keeps watch over the endless flotillas of container ships. 🗺 *Map P5*

4 Islas Hormigas
These tiny, rocky islets off Cabo de Palos are topped by another lighthouse – a beautiful sight at dusk. 🗺 *Map Q5*

5 Punta Negra
Perched over a tiny bay with unusual dark sand, this lighthouse stands at the western end of the beautiful Regional Park of Calblanque (see pp8–9). Walking trails splinter off in all directions, and there’s a spectacular hike along the cliffs. 🗺 *Map P5*

6 Islas de Escombreras
A few islets are strewn around the entrance to the enormous port at Cartagena; a lighthouse, visible from the cape below Escombreras, gives early warning to ships. 🗺 *Map P5*

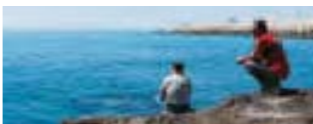
7 Cabo Tiñoso
A straggling dirt track leads to the lighthouse at the tip of this wild and beautiful headland, gazing out over crashing waves, long fingers of rock, and tiny, hidden bays. 🗺 *Map N5*

8 Puerto de Mazarrón
The family resort of Puerto de Mazarrón is sprawled around a rugged, cove-studded cape. A dusty path wriggles to the top for beautiful sea views from the lighthouse. 🗺 *Map M5*

9 Punta del Poniente
The coastline gets wilder as it heads down the Costa Cálida. The lighthouse at the tip of the Punta del Poniente (north of Águilas) keeps watch over sheer cliffs and scores of tiny islands. 🗺 *Map L6*

10 Águilas
Águilas’s lighthouse stands guard at the southern end of the bay, near the town’s pretty fishing port. Painted in black and white stripes, it looks like something out of a storybook. To complete the picture, above it looms the dramatic castle. 🗺 *Map L6*





Left **Windsurfing** Right **Fishing**

TOP 10 Sports Facilities

1 Diving Most of the resorts on the Mar Menor, as well as the southern resorts of Puerto de Mazarrón and Águilas, have a number of companies offering diving courses, excursions and equipment hire. Tourist offices can provide lists.

2 Snorkelling The endless coves of the coastline (Águilas alone boasts 35) are perfect for snorkelling, but the very best place to try it is the Regional Park of Calblanque, where the protected waters are clear and the bays are secluded.

3 Sailing The Mar Menor is famous for its many marinas and excellent sailing facilities. The tranquil inland sea is ideal for beginners, and there is plenty to keep experienced sailors happy on the Mediterranean side of La Manga.

4 Windsurfing Sailboards for windsurfing can be hired at almost every beach on the Mar Menor. Beginners will find the quiet inland sea a good place to learn; more advanced windsurfers can brave the Mediterranean.

5 Fishing Fishing is very popular in Spain, but permits are usually required. Tourist information offices or local fishing tackle shops can provide information.

6 Golf The famous La Manga Club (*see p44*) has three championship courses, open to all on payment of green fees. The nearby Las Lomas Village and Spa (*see p130*) also has a golf course.

7 Horse Riding There are several stables around the Mar Menor, including a number in Los Belones offering treks around the Regional Park of Calblanque (*see pp8–9*). Tourist offices will have the details.

8 Tennis Many of the larger hotels around the Mar Menor boast tennis courts, and will usually let non-residents play for a fee. Most of the larger towns along the coast have municipal courts, which can be hired through the local tourist information office.

9 Hiking The Natural Park of Calnegre and Cabo Cope has some good hiking, but the very best walking trails can be found in the Regional Park of Calblanque. A long-distance walking path, the GR92, runs the whole length of the Costa Cálida.

10 Bird-watching The salt lakes in the Regional Park of Calblanque attract numerous birds, as do the protected salt flats around Lo Pagán, on the northern shores of the Mar Menor.



There are few surfing spots on the Costa Blanca, but experienced surfers should head for the Regional Park of Calblanque.

Left **Fuente de Cope** Right **Bolnuevo**

TOP 10 Beaches

1 Calblanque
The beaches of the Regional Park of Calblanque are the best in the whole of the Costa Blanca. Choose from sandy stretches, or discover your own private cove (see pp8–9). ☹ Map P5

2 Calabardina
Tucked around a tiny bay with crystal-clear waters, pretty little Calabardina is a charming and barely developed resort, boasting several quiet beaches and rocky coves. ☹ Map L6

3 Fuente de Cope
Near the watchtower in the Natural Park of Calnegre y Cabo Cope (see p95), this is a wonderfully unspoilt stretch of coastline, with rocky outcrops and pools sheltered by the impressive cape. ☹ Map L6

4 Bolnuevo
Bolnuevo's long, sandy beach is backed by surreal rock formations (see p37), and has plenty of cafés and other facilities. To really get away from it all, head south down the coast, where there are dozens of secret coves. ☹ Map M5

5 Portús
Tucked in the lee of a rocky headland south of Cartagena, this narrow pebbly beach is well off the beaten track. There are little bays to be discovered, and it's an authorized nudist beach. ☹ Map N5

6 Punta Negra
Escape the crowds in this tiny cove near the ghostly former mining town of Portman. The shingled beaches are dotted with upturned boats. Nearby, there's excellent walking in the Regional Park of Calblanque. ☹ Map P5

7 Playa Honda
One of the most popular beaches on the Mar Menor, the Playa Honda is a wonderful 7-km (4-mile) stretch of sand around Mar de Cristal, with every imaginable facility. ☹ Map Q5

8 Águilas
The elegant curve of Águilas's bay is broken by strangely shaped volcanic islands, perfect for snorkelling. Long, fine sands and plenty of amenities have made it extremely popular with families. ☹ Map L6

9 Santiago de la Ribera
The main beach of this upmarket resort is backed by a wooden, palm-shaded boardwalk, and the long sandy expanse is lined with countless bars and cafés. It's particularly good for families. ☹ Map P4

10 Cala del Pino
On the Mar Menor side of La Manga, this popular beach with fine sand looks out over the islets dotting the inland sea. All kinds of facilities (including a marina) are close at hand. ☹ Map Q4





Venezuela

TOP 10 Places to Eat

Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

1 Venezuela, Lo Pagán

A pretty, traditional restaurant with fabulous sea views and deftly prepared fresh seafood. It's a good place to try *dorada a la sal* (see p64). ☎ C/Campoamar s/n • Map P4 • 968 18 15 15 • €€

2 El Puerto, Puerto de Mazarrón

Right on the port, it will come as no surprise that this popular local restaurant specializes in seafood. The *caldereta de langostinos*, a delectable stew made with local prawns, is wonderful. ☎ Plaza del Mar • Map M5 • 968 59 48 05 • Closed Mon & annual hols (varies) • €€

3 Virgen del Mar, Puerto de Mazarrón

This relaxed family restaurant right on the beachfront serves flavoursome rice dishes and simply prepared local fish. ☎ Paseo Marítimo • Map M5 • 968 59 50 57 • Closed Sun D in winter • €€€

4 El Faro, Águilas

Stylish, friendly and popular with a younger crowd, El Faro serves tasty local dishes at very reasonable prices. ☎ C/José María Pereda s/n • Map L6 • 968 41 28 83 • Closed Tue & Wed D • €€

5 Los Sauces, nr Cartagena

Creative Mediterranean cuisine with Basque and French influences and a crisply elegant setting make this one of the top dining destinations in Murcia (see p67).

6 La Tartana, Cartagena

This elegant restaurant serves delectable seafood right on the port. The *menú del día* is a bargain. There's also a busy tapas bar. ☎ Puerta de Murcia 14 • Map P5 • 968 50 00 11 • Closed Sun in summer • €€€

7 Las Brisas, Águilas

Decked out like a ship, Las Brisas specializes in fish. It serves a good lunchtime *menú del día* – the only time you'll find their excellent *paella* on the menu. ☎ Explanada del Puerto • Map L6 • 968 41 00 27 • Closed Mon • €€€

8 Restaurante La Tana, Cabo de Palos

Good seafood and rice dishes at this popular restaurant near the port. The house speciality is *arroz la Tana*, a succulent stew of squid and shrimp. ☎ Paseo de la Barra 33 • Map Q5 • 968 56 30 03 • Closed Dec • €€

9 El Mosquí, Cabo de Palos

Excellent *caldero* (see p64) and fabulously fresh *pescado frito* (fried fish platter) at this popular dining spot with a nautical feel. ☎ Subida al Faro s/n • Map Q5 • 968 56 45 63 • Closed Thu, D in winter • €€

10 La Casa del Reloj, San Pedro del Pinatar

This beautiful 19th-century mansion contains several elegant dining spaces set around a patio, and a piano bar. Particularly good rice dishes. ☎ Las Plazas s/n • Map P3 • 968 18 24 06 • Closed Wed • €€€









Left Balneario de Archena Right Jumilla Castle

Inland Murcia

MURCIA IS SPAIN AT ITS MOST AUTHENTIC AND UNSPOILT. *Enchanting villages spill down hillsides topped with ruined castles bequeathed by the soldier-knights who ruled here after the Reconquest; verdant fields and orchards recall the Arabs who first cultivated these lands. The Romans brought the vine, and wine is still produced in the charming wine towns of Jumilla, Bullas and Yecla – the perfect accompaniment to the robust mountain cuisine served in countless country restaurants. Wild sierras fan out to the furthest corners of the province; the loveliest of them all, the magnificent Regional Park of the Sierra de Espuña, is a stunning, forested mountain range, scattered with ancient snow wells, and home to a wonderful variety of animal and bird life. Murcia City bursts with extravagant Baroque churches and palaces, and its sumptuous cathedral (see pp28–29), 400 years in the making, is one of the finest in Spain.*



Town Hall, Murcia City



10 Sights

- 1 Murcia City
- 2 Archena
- 3 Jumilla
- 4 Caravaca de la Cruz
- 5 Moratalla
- 6 Calasparra
- 7 Mula
- 8 Lorca
- 9 Aledo
- 10 Sierra de Espuña



1

Murcia City

The welcoming capital city of Murcia Province is a delightful mix of the old and the new, with flamboyant Baroque churches, elegant modern shopping avenues, flower-filled public squares and gardens, and intriguing museums all clustered together in the old centre (*see p30*). The magnificent Baroque Cathedral of Santa María (*see pp28–9*) is one of the loveliest in all Spain. The graceful squares are packed with excellent tapas bars and restaurants. Map N3



Jumilla

on offer. The old town has a pair of pretty churches and an unusual palaeochristian funerary monument, and is crowned by Jumilla's much-restored 15th-century castle, which offers panoramic views of the vine-covered plain and distant sierras.

Map A4

2

Archena

There is little to see in the sleepy market town of Archena besides the florid Baroque Church of San Juan Batista and a few neglected aristocratic mansions, but its spa (Balneario de Archena) has been famous since Roman times. Prettily located in a cool palm grove on the banks of the River Segura, the spa has grown into a miniature village, complete with a delightful chapel and 19th-century casino. There are three hotels (*see p128*), and a whole range of health and beauty treatments are on offer. Map M2

3

Jumilla

Jumilla, an unassuming country town piled chaotically on a hillside, is surrounded by endless vines (*see p56*). The Romans first introduced wine to the area almost 2,000 years ago, and it has been produced here ever since. You can find out about its history in the local Museo del Vino, or take a tour of the *bodegas* for a taste of what's

4

Caravaca de la Cruz

The golden town of Caravaca de la Cruz is spectacularly set among the rugged sierras of northeastern Murcia. After the Reconquest, the town passed to the Knights Templar, who built the handsome castle, which still dominates the town. This contains Caravaca's greatest treasure, the Santuario de la Vera Cruz, which houses a relic of the True Cross, brought here, according to legend, by two angels in 1231. The miracle is commemorated annually on 3 May, when the relic is processed through the streets. A handsome ensemble of medieval and Renaissance mansions and churches are clustered in the old town. Map K2



Caravaca de la Cruz



La Virgen de la Esperanza

A shepherd discovered the “Virgin of Hope” in a cave near Calasparra, but the tiny statue miraculously grew too heavy to lift when the townspeople came to transfer it to a church. The sanctuary they built over the cave has been the focus of popular pilgrimages ever since, and the Virgin remains one of the most venerated in Spain.

5 Moratalla

Medieval Moratalla is a tawny huddle of stone houses steeply piled around a sturdy castle. A traditional mountain town with few monuments, Moratalla’s greatest charms are the natural beauty of the surrounding sierras and its tranquil pace of life, which continues much as it has for centuries. The local cuisine is traditional, with hearty stews and plenty of grilled meat and game. The festivals, particularly Easter Week, are celebrated in old-fashioned style. On Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, the town resounds to the sound of almost a thousand drummers making their way through the centre of town.

☞ Map K1

6 Calasparra

Calasparra overlooks a lush valley on the banks of the River Segura; settlers have been drawn to this area since neolithic times. During the Middle Ages, it was an important frontier settlement controlled by the Order of the Knights of Malta, who built its 13th-century castle. Now, it’s a serene agricultural

town surrounded by a sea of blossom in spring, and golden rice fields in the autumn. Rice dishes feature prominently on local menus (*see p64*), along with pungent cured sausages and hams. ☞ Map K1

7 Mula

Mula is clamped to a steep hillside beneath the impressive ruins of a 16th-century castle. The intricate maze of winding streets and passages at the heart of the old quarter recalls the town’s Arabic origins. Here you will find faded mansions and elaborate churches, many built under the auspices of the Marquises of Vélez during the 16th century, when Mula enjoyed its greatest period of prosperity. On the

fringes of the town, the delightful spa at Baños de Mula has been famous since Roman times. ☞ Map L2



Lorca

8 Lorca

Lorca, an elegant, historic city sprawled beneath the ruins of a 13th-century fortress, is justly celebrated throughout Spain for its wealth of magnificent Baroque

architecture. Its elegant avenues and squares are scattered with sumptuous escutcheoned mansions and lavish churches. The beautiful Plaza de España at the heart of the old quarter is overlooked by the splendid Excolegiata de San Patricio (*see p52*) and the arcaded 17th-century town hall. A clutch of museums is dedicated to Lorca’s lengthy history and ancient traditions, including the Holy Week processions for which it is famous. ☞ Map K4



9

Aledo

The peaceful medieval village of Aledo is huddled tightly behind vestiges of ancient walls, on a rocky outcrop that juts out alarmingly over the surrounding valley. Perched at the tip of the village is a watchtower, surrounded by a modern walkway offering beautiful views over the terraced hillsides and distant peaks. Three km (2 miles) away, an elegant 18th-century sanctuary with a richly carved *artesonado* ceiling houses a much-venerated image of the local patron saint, Santa Eulalia. Aledo sits on the borders of the wonderful Regional Park of the Sierra de Espuña. Map L4

10

Sierra de Espuña

A lush and verdant stretch of forested mountains in the heart of Murcia has been converted into the spectacular Regional Park of the Sierra de Espuña (see pp20–21), a paradise for hikers, bird-watchers and anyone seeking respite from the searing summer heat. In spring, the slopes are covered with a carpet of wild flowers, and there's a network of excellent walking trails adapted to hikers of all abilities. Wild boar, rare squirrels and mountain sheep have made the forests their home.



Sierra de Espuña, view from park entrance

A Day in Inland Murcia

Morning



Allow a full day for this drive, which includes time for hiking. Begin at the little mountain village of **Aledo**, with panoramic views of peaks and valleys, before following the signs for Bullas and turning off at the **Sierra de Espuña Regional Park**. Just within the park boundaries, stop at the information kiosk for a map, then continue along the twisting mountain road, which offers breathtaking glimpses of forested crags. The left-hand turn signposted *pozos de nieve* will take you to the snow wells, reached by a path from the small car park at the crook of the road. This is a great place for a hike. Return to the Collado Bermejo and take the right-hand fork through forests and glades of wild flowers to the **visitor information centre** and exhibition. Have lunch at the nearby **Fuente del Hielo**, where wild boar snuffle fearlessly at the doorway for dropped crumbs.

Afternoon

Next, take the signposted road for the little hamlet of El Berro, close to the arid wilderness of the **Barrancos de Gebas**, otherwise known as the "Bad Lands". There are panoramic views from the **Caserío de Gebas** on the C3315. The road leads north to Pliego, a sleepy village topped with a ruined tower, and on to **Mula** (see p47), with its fascinating medieval centre and striking ruined castle. Join the locals for an old-fashioned country dinner at the **Venta La Magdalena** (see p109).





Left **El Centro de Artesanía** Right **Carlos at work in his Pastelería Carlos**

TOP 10 Murcia City Shops

1 El Centro de Artesanía
The best place to find all kinds of Murcian arts and crafts, from ceramics to handmade figurines. It's run by the Murcian provincial government, and there's another branch in Lorca.

☎ *C/Francisco Rabal 8 • Map S4*

2 Artesanía Abellán
Murcia is famous for its beautifully crafted *belenes*, the figures used to decorate traditional nativity scenes at Christmas. This old-fashioned shop sells a host of figures, from angels and saints to farmers and fishermen.

☎ *C/Mayor 16 • Map N3*

3 Pastelería Carlos
The Arabs introduced the delicious pastries for which Murcia is still celebrated. This cake shop has a mouthwatering selection. The *paparajotes*, light, lemon-flavoured pastries, are divine.

☎ *C/Jaime El Conquistador • Map T4*

4 Manuel Nicolás Almansa
There are more weird and wonderful nativity figurines at this traditional workshop.

☎ *C/Belenes 12 • Map N3*

5 Enoteca Selección Casa Rambla

There's a huge selection of local, Spanish and international wines at this enormous shop, along with a good range of liqueurs and fiery local spirits.

☎ *C/Saavedra Fajardo 15 • Map U5*

6 Paparajote
This little souvenir shop close to Murcia's biggest sight, the extravagantly Baroque cathedral (see pp28–9), sells all kinds of gifts, from t-shirts to hard-to-find local delicacies such as hand-made sweets from inland villages.

☎ *C/ Apóstoles 14 • Map U6*

7 Casa Pedreña
This charming, old-fashioned grocery shop, trading for more than a century, sells a wide range of wines and liqueurs from the region.

☎ *C/Platería 27 • Map T5*

8 Mercado de las Verónicas
Set in a whimsical Modernista building, Murcia's delightful covered market offers a huge variety of fresh produce, including fish and locally reared meats.

☎ *Plano de San Francisco • Map T6*

9 Los Dos TT
This chic upmarket boutique selling international designer fashions for women is just one of many shops devoted to shoes, fashion and accessories lining the pedestrian streets of the old town.

☎ *Plaza Santo Domingo 1 • Map U5*

10 Bonache
If you are planning a picnic, stop off at this traditional bakery for some *empanadas*, the traditional pastries stuffed with all kinds of fillings from tuna to ham. There's also a vegetarian version made with *pisto* (like ratatouille).

☎ *Plaza Flores 8 • Map T6*





La Tapa

10 Murcia City Tapas Bars

Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

1 La Muralla

This smart tapas bar located in Murcia's fanciest hotel (*see p126*) is as famous for the stretch of Arabic wall incorporated into its design as for the excellence of its tapas. C/Apóstoles 34 • Map U6 • 968 21 22 39 • €€

2 El Arco

This elegant café-bar has a huge terrace out on a graceful square, perfect for lingering over breakfast or a light lunch, even better for people-watching in the evenings. C/Arco de Santo Domingo s/n • Map U5 • 968 21 97 67 • €€

3 La Tapa

A simple, buzzy tapas bar on one of Murcia's liveliest squares. There's plenty of choice, and you can sit out on the terrace to watch the action. Plaza de las Flores 13 • Map T5 • 968 21 13 17 • €

4 Pacopepe

The tapas at Pacopepe are among the best in town. Try the delicious stuffed artichokes, or one of the celebrated mushroom dishes – everything is fresh from the orchards and gardens around the city. C/Madre de Dios 14 • Map T6 • 968 21 95 87 • Closed Sun • €€

5 Confitería Viena

Stop off for a refreshing ice cream or an ice-cold *granizado* (crushed ice drink), which you can take away or consume on the tiny street terrace. C/Trapería 30 • Map U5 • 968 21 18 00 • €

6 Abu Nuwas

Sink into the cushions at this magical Arabic-style tearoom and bar, where you can choose from more than 80 different infusions – plus wonderful Moroccan pastries. C/Ruipérez 8 • Map T5 • 968 22 20 42 • Opens 4pm daily • €

7 Mesón El Corral

This classic, colourfully tiled *mesón* on a lively square serves hearty Castilian stews and grilled meat, and the tapas bar has an excellent selection of traditional dishes. Plaza Santa Domingo 23–4 • Map U5 • 968 21 45 97 • €€

8 Pequeña Taberna Típica

The name says it all. This typical little tavern serves great Murcian specialities, with first-rate local cured sausages and hams. Plaza San Juan • Map U6 • 968 21 98 40 • Closed Tue • €

9 El Ahorcado Feliz

The "Happy Hanged Man" is the most unusual café in Murcia. The furniture is made up of flea-market finds; the floor is a mosaic of smashed plates and ceramics. Great for a coffee, even better for a drink. C/Cánovas del Castillo 35 • Map V6 • no tel • Open 3pm daily • €

10 Jota Ele

Another local favourite, Jota Ele has excellent old-fashioned tapas, including delicious local hams and preserves, as well as smoked fish. Plaza Santa Isabel 3 • Map T5 • 968 22 07 30 • Closed Sun • €





Left **Embutidos at Matanza** Right **Semana Santa procession**

10 Local Traditions and Festivals

1 Matanza

As in olden times, farming families in inland towns still slaughter their pigs every November to create the famous *embutidos* (cured sausages and hams) (see p64).

2 Semana Santa

Holy Week is a huge event, with lavish processions taking place throughout the week. The most spectacular are held in Murcia City, Cartagena, Jumilla, Lorca and Cieza.

3 Martes Santo

On Holy Tuesday, an ear-splitting parade of drummers processes through Mula during the *Gran Tamborada*. There are other *tamboradas* at Moratalla on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. ☉ Map L2 (Mula), K1 (Moratalla)

4 Viernes Santo

Good Friday has a special significance in Murcia City. The week's processions culminate with a parade of gilded *pasos* (floats) featuring sculptures by the Baroque artist Francisco Salzillo (see p31). ☉ Map N3

5 Fiestas de Primavera

Murcia City's Spring Fiesta (from the Tuesday following Easter Sunday) begins with the bizarre ritual of the Burial of the Sardine, a joyful Battle of the Flowers, and the *Bando de la Huerta*, a parade of amusing, satirical floats. ☉ Map N3

6 Fiestas de la Cruz de Caravaca

In the first week of May, Caravaca commemorates ancient legends and miracles with processions of "knights" on horseback and other traditional events in the Festival of the Cross of Caravaca (see pp 46, 51). ☉ Map K2

7 Carnavales

Carnival is an excuse to party hard across the region (see p50). Águilas really goes to town as parades process riotously through the streets and parties erupt in every bar and square. ☉ Map L6

8 Fiesta de Cartigeneses y Romanos

Mock battles between Moors and Christians are common in the Costa Blanca. In Cartagena's Festival of the Carthaginians and the Romans, held in September, the mock battles commemorate the expulsion of the Romans from the city. ☉ Map P5

9 Fiesta de la Vendimia

Jumilla celebrates its ancient Wine Harvest Festival in the last two weeks of August. ☉ Map A4

10 Festival Internacional de Teatro, Música y Danza

One of the biggest cultural events on the Murcian calendar, San Javier's International Festival of Theatre, Music and Dance is a great opportunity to see international performers at venues across the city. ☉ Map N3





Rincón de Pepe

TOP 10 Places to Eat

Price Categories

For a three course meal for one with half a bottle of wine (or equivalent meal), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €20
	€€ €20–€30
	€€€ €30–€40
	€€€€ €40–€50
	€€€€€ over €50

1 Cándido, Lorca
This local favourite specializes in mountain stews made with beans and flavoured with cured meat. ☎ *C/Santo Domingo 13 • Map K4 • 968 46 69 07 • Closed Sun D • €€*

2 Rincón de Paco, Caravaca de la Cruz
Bullfighting posters and other taurine memorabilia line the bar at this popular local eatery. ☎ *C/Lonjas 5 • Map K2 • 968 70 83 90 • Closed Tue • €€*

3 Charcur Ontur, Jumilla
A carnivore's delight, this friendly local restaurant specializes in succulent meats such as kid and lamb, simply grilled over charcoal. ☎ *C/Barón del Solar 76 • Map A4 • 968 78 19 61 • Closed Mon D, Tue • €€*

4 El Teatro, Lorca
Ceramic tiles and sturdy wooden furniture set the scene at this down-to-earth restaurant, which serves good local dishes like *pan de Calatrava*, a home-made custard-like dessert. ☎ *Plaza de Colón 12 • Map K4 • 968 46 99 09 • Closed Sun D, Mon, Aug • €€€*

5 El Chaleco, Alhama de Murcia
At this family-run restaurant you can dine on traditional Murcian specialities, wonderful home-made desserts and a good selection of regional wines. ☎ *Avenida Bastarache 9 • Map M3 • 968 63 01 04 • Closed Mon, Sun D (Jul, Aug) • €€*

6 Venta La Magdalena, Baños de Mula
Locals love the old-fashioned home cooking at this big roadside eatery, including a special rice dish made with snails and rabbit. ☎ *Ctra de Murcia Km 17 • Map M2 • 968 66 05 68 • Closed Mon–Thu D, Wed, mid-Jul–mid-Aug • €*

7 Las Cadenas, Murcia
This relaxed local restaurant serves Murcian dishes featuring meat, seafood and other fresh produce, but the highlight here is the home-made desserts. ☎ *C/Apóstoles 10, Murcia • Map U6 • 968 22 09 24 • Closed Sun • €€*

8 Rincón de Pepe, Murcia
This handsome, formal restaurant in Murcia's best hotel offers elaborate regional dishes accompanied by an excellent wine list (*see p67*).

9 Hispano II, Murcia
This hotel-restaurant in the heart of the city serves fresh Mediterranean cuisine based on whatever is most appetizing in the market that day. ☎ *C/Radio Murcia 3 • Map U5 • 968 21 61 52 • Closed Sat D & Sun in Jul & Aug • €€€*

10 El Sol, Cehegín
This old-fashioned restaurant in the heart of medieval Cehegín serves traditional Murcian dishes with a creative twist. You can dine out on a little terrace. ☎ *C/Mayor 17 • Map K2 • 968 74 00 64 • Closed 1st half July • €€*



Remember that most restaurants – even the more expensive ones – have very reasonably priced lunchtime menús del día.





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COSTA BLANCA'S TOP 10



Left **Tourist office** Middle **Information sign in Alicante** Right **Wheelchair access to the beach**

TOP 10 Planning Your Trip

1 Climate and When to Go

Winter is mild, summer hot and dry. Spring and early autumn find the country at its lushest, and there's room on the beach. In summer, it's crowded and more expensive, but good for the hedonistic nightlife.

2 Visas and Red Tape

EU citizens and those from countries within the Schengen Agreement can enter Spain with a valid ID card or passport. Americans, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders can stay with no visa for up to 90 days. Citizens of other countries may require a visa.

3 Embassies and Consulates

These provide information about visiting, working in and retiring to Spain, and have useful websites.

4 Tourist Offices

The slick and efficient Spanish National Tourism Service provides a wealth of glossy brochures, maps and leaflets; their website is a useful starting point.

☎ www.tourspain.com

5 Resources for Disabled Travellers

Facilities are generally inadequate, but have improved dramatically in recent years. The following organizations can give you general information in advance.

☎ **UK Holiday Care Information Unit:** 01293 774535.
www.holidaycare.org.uk •
USA SATH: 212 447 7284.
www.sath.org

6 Languages

Valencian (related to Catalan) and Spanish (Castilian) are the two official languages of the Autonomous Community of Valencia, of which the Costa Blanca is part. Spanish is spoken in Murcia. Valencian is more common inland, particularly in the northern Costa Blanca.

7 Internet Sources

There are several excellent multilingual websites dedicated to the Costa Blanca. See the Directory for a list.

8 Insurance

EU citizens get state health care on production of an E111 form (bring this from your own country), but it's a complicated process, and private travel insurance is highly recommended. The same applies to non-EU visitors. Dentistry is not covered under such agreements, and can be expensive.

9 What to Take

Casual dress is acceptable, but bring a smart outfit for upmarket restaurants or clubs. Evenings inland can get cool, so bring a light sweater. Sunscreen is essential and mosquito repellent useful. You'll

need sturdy footwear in the regional parks if you are planning to do some hiking. It's handy too to have a plug adaptor.

10 Public Holidays

On public holidays, some bars, restaurants and shops may close, particularly in the inland regions. The transport system runs restricted services, and if you are planning to do any travelling, you should book tickets well in advance. If the holiday falls midweek, it's common to take an extra day off, forming a long weekend known as a *punte* (bridge).

Directory

Main Tourist Offices

Alicante: *Rambla de Méndez Núñez 23*
• 965 20 00 00

Murcia City: *Glorieta de España 1* • 968 35 86 00

Spanish National Tourist Offices

UK: 22–23 Manchester Square, London W1M 5AP • 20 7486 8077

USA: 666 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10103
• 212 265 8822

Useful Websites

www.costablanca.org
• www.alicanteturismo.com • www.murcia ciudad.com • www.comunidad-valenciana.com • www.carm.es
(Spanish only)





Left **Eurolines** coach ticket office Right **A train on the national RENFE network**

10 Getting There

1 Flying Europe to Alicante (Alacant)

Alicante is served by numerous "no-frills" carriers and major airlines from other Spanish and European cities. Book early in high season or around major holidays, and check the Internet for the best deals.

2 Flying North America to Alicante

There are no direct flights. US and Canadian visitors usually have to change at Madrid, Barcelona or elsewhere. Delta Airlines fly to Barcelona, from where you can take the high-speed Euromed train to Alicante. Iberia serves most major North American airports.

3 Flying Europe to Murcia

There are direct flights from the UK, Ireland and (usually via Madrid) most major European cities. During the high season charter flights can offer great deals.

4 Flying North America to Murcia

There are no direct flights from North America to Murcia. Try Iberia to Madrid, plus an onward connection, or British Airways via London.

5 Ferries from the Balearics

Denia (Dénia) is the main Costa Blanca ferry port for the Balearics. Both

Balearia and Iscomar run regular car and passenger ferries from Ibiza and Palma (Mallorca).

6 Trains

Spain's national rail system, RENFE, is clean, efficient and inexpensive. The plush, high-speed Euromed service connects major towns between Barcelona, Alicante and Murcia; overnight services run from Paris to Madrid and Barcelona. Book in advance. www.renfe.es

7 Coaches

International coach services run to Alicante, Benidorm, Murcia and most larger resorts in summer. Coaches are cheap, but journeys are long (London to Alicante, for example, takes at least 26 hours). Try Eurolines for starters. www.eurolines.com

8 Roads

The main motorway down Spain's east coast is the A7 (aka E15); the tolls can be quite dear. The toll-free N332 road links Valencia and Murcia, but gets very busy in high season.

9 Package Holidays

Countless tour operators offer package deals to the Costa Blanca, ranging from self-catering apartments to smart hotels. They are inexpensive, but focus on the biggest, most crowded resorts.

10 Sailing

Sailing is enormously popular all along the Costa Blanca. Virtually every resort boasts a well-equipped marina, including Alicante, Denia, Xabia, Teulada, Calp, Altea, Benidorm, La Vila Joiosa, Santa Pola, the Isla Tabarca, Torrevieja, Santiago de la Ribera, Cartagena, Cabo de Palos, Puerto de Mazarrón, and Águilas. The Alicante port authority is a useful source of information. www.puertoalicante.com

Directory

Airports

Alicante airport: El Altet
 • 966 91 91 00
 • www.aena.es/alicante

Airlines

Aer Lingus (Ireland)
 • (353) 818 365 000
 • www.aerlingus.ie

Air Canada

• (888) 247 2262
 • www.aircanada.ca

American Airlines (USA)

• (800) 433 7300
 • www.aa.com

British Airways (UK)

• 0845 773 3377
 • www.britishairways.com

British Midland/bmi (UK)

• 0870 607 0555
 • www.flybmi.com

Iberia (UK) • 08705 341 341 • www.iberia.com

EasyJet (UK)

• 08717 500 100
 • www.easyjet.com





Left The narrow-gauge 'Trenet' Middle Local buses Right Taxis

TOP 10 Getting Around

1 By Road

A car is often a nuisance rather than a benefit in the larger towns and resorts, which are always clogged with traffic, particularly during the evening rush hour (6–8pm). Parking can be a problem, but larger towns have underground car parks which charge around €5–€10 per day. Your own transport is virtually essential to see the remoter corners of the Costa Blanca.

2 Rules of the Road

Speed limits (often ignored) are 120 kph on motorways (*autopistas*), 100 kph on main roads, and 50 kph in built-up areas. Seat belts (also ignored) are compulsory in the front seats, and in the rear where fitted. The legal alcohol limit is a mere 0.05% (regularly flouted), anyone caught can be fined up to €300 on the spot.

3 Car Rental

There are car hire offices at the airports, and plenty more at train stations and in major towns and resorts. The cheapest deals can usually be found over the Internet; many airlines offer concessions. It's advisable to book well in advance during holiday periods. ☎ www.alicante-travel-car.com • www.avis.es • www.easycar.com • www.holidayautos.co.uk • www.iberocar.com

4 Train

The rail network offers a bewildering array of services. The most useful on the Costa Blanca are the local (*cercanías*) and regional (*regionales*) trains which connect most larger cities and resorts. They are generally punctual and inexpensive.

5 El Trenet

A narrow-gauge train runs from El Campelló on the outskirts of Alicante and connected to the city centre by tram) to Denia (Dénia), stopping at most resorts. It is scenic, especially between Altea and Denia, but very slow.

6 FEVE

A pretty Modernista train station in Cartagena is the starting point for the narrow-gauge railway that links the city with the small resort of Los Nietos on the Mar Menor. It's not a very scenic route, but it's cheap and convenient. ☎ www.feve.es (Spanish only)

7 Local Buses and Coaches

Local bus services are rarely useful for visitors as most sights are in the town centres. But many inland villages are not on the train network, and are only accessible by bus. Different companies serve different areas, which can be confusing, but there are information offices in bus stations,

and the tourist offices also have timetables.

☎ *Alicante bus/coach station: C/Portugal 17. Map T3. 965 13 07 00 • Murcia bus/coach station: C/Bolos s/n. Map S5. 968 29 22 11*

8 Taxis

Taxis are cheap and plentiful – at least in the larger towns and resorts. They can be hailed on the street or from taxi stands; a green light on the top indicates that they are free. Otherwise, you can, of course, call for a taxi (see below).

☎ *Radio Taxi: 965 25 25 11 (Alicante); 965 85 26 26 (Benidorm); 968 24 88 00 (Murcia) • Wheelchair-accessible taxis Euro Taxi: 620 99 00 33 (Murcia)*

9 Cycling

Competitive cycling is very popular in Spain (see p44). Pottering around the countryside on a bike is less common, but nonetheless delightful. Bike hire is common in resorts and at rural hotels.

10 On Foot

All the towns and villages are best explored on foot. The main sights are usually clustered in the historic centres, and a stroll will throw up all kinds of delightful details that you might otherwise miss. Hikers are spoilt for choice; there are several Natural and Regional Parks, as well as long-distance walking trails, such as the GR92.





A pharmacy – first port of call for minor ailments

TOP 10 Health and Security

1 Emergency Numbers

In an emergency dial 112. English-speaking operators will connect you to the appropriate service. There are also free direct numbers for police, ambulance and fire brigade (see *Directory*).

2 Police

Spain has several types of police. The *Policía Nacional* (brown uniforms) deal with urban crime, so report anything stolen to them. The *Policía Local* (in dark blue) deal with minor urban crime and traffic control. The *Guardia Civil* (green uniforms) police the main highways and rural areas. Police stations are listed in phone books under *Comisarias*.

3 Health Issues

No inoculations are needed for Spain. Beware mainly of heatstroke and sunburn. Use sunscreen, wear a hat, and stay in the shade between noon and 4pm. Jellyfish stings are an occasional nuisance. Rinse them in fresh water with bicarbonate of soda.

4 Prescriptions

Bring any prescription drugs you require with you in your hand baggage. Spanish medication may differ from your own in name, dosage and form, so you should bring the generic (rather than brand) name of your medicine in case you need a repeat prescription.

5 Pharmacies

Spanish pharmacists are highly trained and very useful for minor ailments. Most major cities have at least one 24-hour pharmacy (*farmacia*). Its details are posted in all pharmacy windows.

6 Multilingual Doctors

The Costa Blanca has a huge expat community, with doctors and dentists catering to all nationalities. Hotels and pharmacies can advise you, and the English-language paper *Costa Blanca News* carries ads. If you're using the EU reciprocal healthcare agreement, make sure the doctor belongs to the Spanish healthcare system.

7 Women Travellers

Women travellers face no difficulties on the cosmopolitan Costa, besides a little flirtation and a few wolf whistles. Dress modestly in the inland towns to ward off unwanted attention, but in big towns and resorts virtually anything goes.

8 Disabled Travellers

Facilities are slowly improving for disabled travellers. Tourist offices provide details of wheelchair-accessible hotels and sights, and restaurants usually do their best, but it is wise to call in advance. Some city buses are adapted

for wheelchairs, and there are special taxi services (see p114).

9 Petty Crime

Petty crime is fairly common, particularly in high season. Lock valuables in a hotel safety deposit box; keep a copy of your passport (separately). Don't leave valuables in your car, and open the glove compartment to show there is nothing to steal. Wear a bag that straps across you, and be wary of "helpful" strangers.

10 Serious Crime

Serious crime is comparatively rare on the Costa Blanca. But in the cities it's wise (as in other countries) to avoid wandering around unlit streets in the seedier neighbourhoods.

Directory

Emergency Numbers

112 (general)
092 (local police)
091 (national police)
080 (fire brigade)
965 71 18 18 (Red Cross)
965 71 79 91 (paramedics)

Major Hospitals

Alicante: C/Maestro Alonso • 965 93 83 00

Benidorm: C/Venezuela • 965 93 83 00

Murcia: Avda Marqués de los Vélez • 968 36 09 00





Left **Withdrawing cash at an ATM** Middle **A typical payphone** Right **International newspapers**

For 10 Banking and Communications

1 Currency

Spain's national currency is the euro, which is divided into 100 *céntimos*. Although all prices are marked in euros, people still often talk in *pesetas* for larger items such as houses and cars.

2 Changing Money

There are money-changing facilities at the airport, and almost all banks offer exchange services. The outlets clustered in the resorts often charge a hefty commission. Banks are usually open 8:30am–2pm Mon–Fri, but in the larger towns some open on Saturday mornings.

3 ATMs

Cash machines can be found on almost every street corner, even in the smallest towns. Look for a sign saying “*Telebanco*”. Instructions are posted in a variety of languages. Spanish banks don't charge a commission for using ATMs, but check whether your own bank will charge you.

4 Credit Cards

Credit cards are commonly accepted in shops, larger hotels and big restaurants, though less so in smaller towns and villages. They are accepted at train stations but almost never at sights and monuments, so ensure that you have enough cash with you.

5 Traveller's Cheques

Traveller's cheques are a useful safety precaution. If they are lost or stolen, they will usually be quickly replaced, unlike cash. Bring cheques in euros to avoid paying commission. Note that they are rarely accepted as a mode of payment, except in the larger hotels and resorts.

6 Post Offices and Estancos

Post offices are identified by a yellow sign saying *Correos y Telégrafos*. Larger branches offer fax, telegram, poste restante and mail-box services. *Estancos* (newspaper kiosks) often sell stamps for postcards home.

7 Phones

Public phone booths are blue or green and very common. Most take phonecards (€5, €10 and €20 from *estancos* – see above) and some accept credit cards. Phones provided in hotel rooms can be very dear. Most foreign mobiles will work in Spain, but it's advisable to check with your service provider in advance.

8 Internet

Internet cafés are easy to find, and tourist information offices have lists of them. Few will allow you to plug in your laptop, but many larger hotels provide modem points in the bedrooms.

9 Newspapers and Magazines

The main Spanish national broadsheets are *El País* (left-leaning) and *El Mundo* (right-leaning). The long-established *Costa Blanca News* is a weekly English-language paper dedicated to the enormous expat community. International press is easily available in Alicante, Murcia City and all the resorts.

10 TV and Radio

TV is a constant presence in most bars, and a set comes as standard even in *pensiones*. Radio fans tune into RNE1 (88.2FM: news/current affairs), Radio Clásica (96.5FM: classical music), Radio 3 (93.2FM: pop), or the BBC World Service (98.5FM).

Directory

Main Post Offices

Alicante: C/Alemania 7
Murcia: Plaza Circular s/n

International Codes

Dial 00 + country code
(USA and Canada 1; UK 44) + area code (minus initial 0) + local number.

Directory Enquiries

National: 1003
International: 025

Lost Credit Cards

American Express:
900 99 44 26
Diner's Club:
902 40 11 12
MC/Visa:
900 97 12 31





August on the Costa Blanca

TOP 10 Things to Avoid

1 Gambling Games

You are bound at some point to come across this scene: a gaggle of people clustered round a makeshift table in the street, someone expertly flipping three little cups, one of which apparently contains a counter. If you're asked to guess the right cup, beware. This is an old gambling scam, and there are never any winners!

2 "Helpful" Strangers

Watch out for these on the street or at petrol stations. They usually work in pairs. While one is telling you that you've dropped your keys or pretends to brush some dirt from your shoulder, the other is relieving you of your wallet.

3 Eating Dinner at 7pm

Along the coast you can find a meal at any time you like. But in the rural inland regions, you will have to adapt to Spanish time and aim to eat around 9pm – unless you want to dine alone. Note too that many restaurants are closed on Sunday evenings.

4 Visiting Museums on Mondays

Almost all the museums in the Costa Blanca are closed on Mondays, so plan your days out accordingly. Churches,

however, are usually open, as are all the Regional and Natural Parks. Monday's also a good shopping day.

5 Conducting Business at Siesta Time

The traditional Spanish siesta may be going out of style, but there is still a long break in the afternoons for most shops and offices, as well as smaller museums and monuments. Banks are closed in the afternoon, and most post offices close for several hours over lunchtime. Churches also regularly close between 1pm and 3pm (often for longer), so get your sightseeing done early.

6 Buying Fish on Mondays

Trawlers don't work on Sundays and Mondays. As a result, the fish section of most covered markets will be closed on Monday. Whether you are buying fish to cook yourself or choosing it from a restaurant menu, it is unlikely to be particularly fresh, and should be avoided.

7 August on the Costa Blanca

August is the traditional holiday month in Spain, when shops, offices, restaurants and hotels across the country close down, and families pile down to the coast. As a

result, accommodation on the Costa Blanca is always dearer and harder to find in August, while the beaches can be unpleasantly crowded, and the roads clogged with an endless stream of traffic.

8 Discarding a Lit Cigarette

The dry, scrubby slopes of the inland regions are at their most fragile during the searing heat of July and August. Discarded cigarettes are a major cause of forest fires and environmental damage. Take care throughout the region.

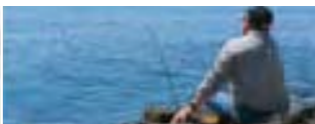
9 Taking Valuables to the Beach

While the Costa Blanca is relatively safe, petty crime is not uncommon. Taking your valuables to the beach is asking for trouble. Ask your hotel to lock them in a safety deposit box, and only take a small amount of cash with you, particularly if your belongings are likely to be unattended while you're in the water.

10 Wasting Water

Water shortages can be a problem in the Costa Blanca during July and August, when demand is greatest. They are unlikely to affect visitors, particularly in the smartest hotels, but you may be asked to take care with the water supply in inland regions.





Left **Golfing in Alicante** Right **Fishing at Torreveja**

Top 10 Specialist Tours

1 Aspects of Spain

This company offers self-catering villa holidays to suit all budgets in the northern Costa Blanca region (mainly around Xàbia (Jávea), Calp (Calpe) and Altea). ☎ *Alma Place, Belmont St, Bognor Regis PO21 1LY • (01243) 842 133 • www.aspectsofspain.com*

2 Bill Goff Golf Tours

Tailor-made golf packages to the La Manga resort on the Mar Menor. This is a family-oriented resort with a huge array of sports facilities. ☎ *75 King St, South Shields NE33 1DP • (0190) 427 5003 • www.billgoff.com*

3 Erna Low Body and Soul

Indulge yourself! Erna Low offer spa holidays in luxurious surroundings at their hotels in Alicante (Alacant) and Denia (Dénia), and soon on the Mar Menor. They can also arrange combined golf-spa breaks. ☎ *9 Reece Mews, London SW7 3HE • (020) 7594 0290 • www.bodyandsoulholidays.com*

4 Exodus Travel

Exodus offer a range of holidays including rock-climbing, walking, cycling – just about any sport you care to try. ☎ *Grangemills, Weir Rd, London SW12 OME • (020) 8675 5550 • www.exodus.co.uk*

5 Headwater Holidays

Headwater run guided walking holidays on the northern Costa Blanca for travellers of moderate fitness. Hikers average 14 km (9 miles) a day through the spectacular scenery of the Sierra de Serrella. Accommodation at traditional family-run inns is included. ☎ *The Old School House, Chester Road, Northwich CW8 1LE • (01606) 720 199 • www.headwater.com*

6 Magic of Spain

This company offers tailor-made holidays to the Costa Blanca, and organizes flights with accommodation in villas and apartments, mainly around Xàbia, Moraira and Altea in the northern Costa Blanca, and the Mar Menor on the Costa Cálida. ☎ *Kings Place, Wood St, Kingston-upon-Thames • (020) 8939 5105 • www.magictravelgroup.com*

7 Fishing Holidays

If you want to try your hand at fishing, this company, based near Benidorm, offers everything from tailor-made packages to one-day fishing trips. Their four sites include lakes, reservoirs, rivers and sea (around the Isla de Benidorm, also known as Peacock Island). Fishing permits can be booked in advance too. ☎ *CL El Barranc, 03578*

Relleu, Alicante, Spain • Map H2 • www.fishingholidaysin.spain.com

8 Vacation Europe

Surprisingly few US-based tour operators offer holidays to the Costa Blanca. Vacation Europe is one, arranging flights, accommodation, car hire and a variety of other services. ☎ *2300 Corporate Boulevard, Suite 214, Boca Ratón, FL 33431 • 800 674 8883 • www.vacationeurope.com*

9 Comtours

Another US operator, Comtours, runs fully escorted coach tours of Andalucía and the Costa Blanca region lasting either seven or nine days. Holidays include flights, accommodation and the services of a multilingual guide. ☎ *1290 Bassett Road, Cleveland, OH 44145 • (440) 835 1480 or 1-800 248 1331 (toll-free) • www.comtours.com*

10 Bike N Bed

This local company provides B&B stays for cyclists, plus detailed route maps. These range from simple, flat tours around Denia to tough mountain climbs. They can arrange for rides with local clubs, and competitive cyclists can even take part in local races. ☎ *C/Bacalla 29, Denia • Map H2 • 966 42 38 40 • enquiries@bikenbed.co.uk*





Left **Children's clothes in a store** Right **Terra Mítica, near Benidorm**

10 Tips for Families

1 Attitudes to Children

The Spanish adore children, and yours will be indulged wherever they go. Children are treated like small adults, and it's not unusual to see them out in restaurants with their parents late at night, or playing outside a café while their families chat away. There are plenty of outdoor playgrounds in every town and resort.

2 Accommodation

Almost all hotels welcome children. Family rooms are common, and some hotels will allow children to stay in their parents' room at no extra charge. Perhaps the most convenient (and cost-effective) way to travel as a family is to rent an apartment or a *casa rural*.

3 Hotel Programmes

Some of the larger hotels offer a programme of activities for guests of all ages, including anything from swimming lessons to organized games and coach excursions.

4 Babysitting

Babysitters are generally available in larger hotels (24 hours' notice usually required); much less so in smaller hotels and *pensiones*. A few hotels have day-care facilities, so check in advance. Larger cities have drop-in children's

centres with play areas and cafés, but parents usually have to stay.

5 Family Meals

Most restaurants are happy to cater for children, though few offer a dedicated children's menu. They are usually more than happy to provide a small portion, or to offer something simple that might not be on the menu. High chairs are not common. Call your chosen restaurant in advance to see if they can provide one.

6 Shopping for Children

There are scores of children's clothes and toy shops in the larger towns. Nappies and formula milk can be found in supermarkets and pharmacies. Make sure you stock up for weekends, as very few shops open on Sundays.

7 Family-oriented Attractions

There's no shortage of family attractions, with the enormous theme park Terra Mítica near Benidorm, plus water-parks, safari parks and fun-parks right across the region. Many horse-riding centres offer pony treks for children, and sailing centres, notably around the Mar Menor, offer classes for beginners of all ages. The Natural and Regional Parks have hiking trails to suit all levels.

8 Child-friendly Beaches

The main resort beaches are very well-g geared toward children, with play areas right on the beach, as well as showers, toilets and snack bars to keep everyone happy. There are usually lifeguard posts and a medical tent in case of mishap. If visiting the quieter coves, find out what the swimming conditions are before venturing into the sea.

9 Attractions for Teenagers

If the beaches begin to pall, teenagers can shop till they drop, visit the theme parks and water-parks, or indulge in every imaginable sporting activity. Some museums are great for teenagers, including Alicante's hi-tech archaeology museum MARQ (see p12) and Murcia City's Museo Hidráulico (see 30).

10 Nightlife

The party scene is wild during the summer, and older teenagers can take their pick of dozens of nightclubs and bars. The best are the *terrazas*, usually open only during the summer months and with big outdoor dance floors. The more infamous Benidorm bars, with their serious drinking culture and resultant brawling, are best avoided.

Left **Tipping** Right **Leisurely café lunch**

TOP 10 Eating and Drinking Tips

1 Breakfast

Breakfast in Spain is traditionally a light and hurried affair – perhaps a pastry or a croissant washed down with milky coffee (*café con leche*). Full English breakfast – complete with egg, bacon and sausage – is available at countless expat-run cafés in the major resorts. Most hotels offer a buffet-style breakfast which will accommodate visitors of all nationalities.

2 Lunch

Lunch, usually eaten around 2pm, is often the major meal of the day. It tends to consist of two or three courses with a glass or two of wine. The Spanish like to take their time over lunch; many smaller shops and local businesses will close for at least two hours. Sunday lunch is often a big family affair, and can last well into the evening.

3 Dinner

The Spanish don't usually sit down to dinner before around 9pm. The vast numbers of foreign visitors are catered for with earlier dining hours in all the coastal resorts. Evening meals tend to be lighter than lunches. Eating out at weekends is very popular, so it is always wise to book ahead. The Spanish plug the gap between lunch and late dinner with a few tapas at a local bar.

4 The Tapeo

The *tapeo*, a kind of bar crawl from tapas bar to tapas bar, is an institution in Alicante (Alacant) and in Murcia City. Both cities boast dozens of tapas bars, many of them famous for a particular speciality: for instance, especially good ham, or delicious home-made *croquetas* (potato croquettes). If you want a larger portion, ask for a *ración*.

5 Vegetarians

Vegetarians have a hard time in Spain, where even apparently innocuous vegetable dishes are regularly flavoured with ham or *chorizo* (cured sausage). There are few vegetarian restaurants, but most places will make up something simple, particularly when given notice. Otherwise, reliable stand-bys include *tortilla* (potato omelette) and platters of Spanish cheese. Salads usually feature tinned tuna (*atún*); ask them to leave out any ingredients that you don't want.

6 Tipping

Spaniards usually just leave a few small coins on the bar when having a drink or a coffee, and round up the bill when in restaurants. Most foreign visitors leave a tip of around 10 per cent at restaurants, particularly in the resorts.

7 Getting Drunk

While plenty of foreigners come to Spain for the cheap booze, getting drunk is generally frowned upon. There is a huge drinking culture in some of the resorts, fuelled by packs of young northern European holiday-makers intent on having such a good time they can't remember it, but the Spanish tend to drink only moderately, and generally accompany their drinks with small snacks or tapas.

8 Sunday-night Closing

Be warned that many restaurants, including those in the main resorts, are closed on Sunday nights.

9 Menú del Día

The fixed-price *menú del día*, served weekday lunchtimes, is geared toward local workers. It usually includes two or three courses with bread and a glass of wine, and is very good value, even at some of the smarter restaurants.

10 Menú de Degustación

Many upmarket restaurants offer a "tasting menu" (*menú de degustación*), which highlights the restaurant's specialities and changes according to what's freshest. It is generally, though not exclusively, available in the evenings.





Left **Self-catering apartment** Right **Tucking into the *menú del día***

TOP 10 Budget Tips

1 Low-season Bargains

Flights and hotels are always cheaper out of season, with some fantastic bargains from October to March – particularly if you look around on the Internet. Many of the larger Spanish hotel chains post special deals on their websites during the rest of the year that can make even the smartest four- and five-star hotels surprisingly affordable.

2 Package Deals

Package holidays (the “package” usually includes flights, transfers and accommodation) are big business on the Costa Blanca, with some incredibly low-priced deals. If you don’t like the resort, you could use the accommodation provided as your base and spend a few nights somewhere else with the money you save.

3 Pensiones, Hostales and Youth Hostels

Pensiones and *hostales* offer the most basic accommodation and have fewer facilities than hotels, but they are the cheapest places to stay on the Costa Blanca. Many cater to backpackers and families on a budget, and offer triple and quadruple rooms, which bring down the costs even more. There are surprisingly few

youth hostels, and many of them are booked up with school parties in the summer months.

4 Self-catering

There are countless self-catering options on the Costa Blanca. These can dramatically bring down costs if you are travelling on a budget. Scores of companies offer apartment or villa rentals. *Casas rurales* (rural houses and apartments) can be spectacularly good value for money for families or large groups.

5 Camping

Campsites are very plentiful on the Costa Blanca, and although prices vary according to facilities and proximity to the beach, they are always pretty cheap. If, however, you have a car, a tent and more than two people, the fees can add up to nearly as much as a cheap hotel room (see also p131).

6 Trains

Of the various train services that run along the Costa Blanca, the luxurious Euromed train is ostensibly the high-speed service, but along this strip of the coast it takes about the same time as the considerably less expensive local and regional trains. The Euromed does have comfortable seats and a café-bar, and even shows films, but it will only save

you time if you are taking a long journey, and it will cost at least twice as much as its more lowly rivals.

7 Concessions

Some museums and monuments offer free entry on certain days. Ask at a tourist information office. Students and senior citizens are eligible for concessions at most sites.

8 Family Tickets

Family tickets (*billete familiar*), usually for two adults and between two and four children, are available at most theme parks and the larger museums, and can offer considerable savings. It’s worth asking for one even if it isn’t advertised.

9 Picnicking

Picnicking is a delightful way to save money. There are hundreds of wonderful picnic spots (see pp75 & 87), and every town or village has a market where you can pick up fabulous fresh bread, fruit, cheese, ham and pastries for your hamper.

10 Eat at Lunchtime

The fixed-price lunch menu, or *menú del día*, is one of the biggest bargains to be had in Spain. Most restaurants, from the humblest to the glitziest, will offer one. In mid-price establishments this will rarely top €10.



Left **Local crafts** Right **Torre Vieja Market**

Top 10 Shopping Tips

1 Opening Hours

Shops are usually open from 10am–2pm and 4–8pm Monday to Saturday. Larger shops and department stores are open all day. The big department store El Corte Inglés (which also has a supermarket) is open until 10pm. Few shops open on Sundays.

2 Customs

Non-EU citizens are permitted to take home one litre of spirits and two litres of wine, as well as 200 cigarettes, 250 grams of tobacco or 50 cigars. EU citizens are limited to “personal use” only, which means in practice that if you turn up at your home airport with more than 10 litres of spirits, 20 litres of fortified wine, 90 litres of wine, 110 litres of beer, 3,200 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 400 cigarillos and 3kg of tobacco, questions are likely to be asked.

3 Fashion

Bargain hunters note: popular international fashion labels originating in Spain (Zara, Mango and Camper, for example) are about a third cheaper in Spain than elsewhere, and there’s a wider range of products available.

4 Clothes Sizes

Try everything on; many Spanish clothes are built for relatively narrow frames. Check that zips and other fittings work

properly. Women’s clothes sizes translate as UK 8/USA 4/Spain 36, through to UK 18/USA 14/Spain 46. Men’s clothes in Spain are usually in small (waist 28–30), medium (waist 32–34), large (waist 36–38) and extra-large (waist 38–40).

5 Crafts and Souvenirs

The Costa Blanca offers plenty of choice for craft- and souvenir-hunting. Most towns have a particular speciality, and you can pick up delicious local wines, well-crafted blankets and woollen goods, the sticky treat *turrón*, or some pretty ceramics (see pp74, 86).

6 Markets

Every town has a weekly market. These sell a wide array of local produce along with all kinds of cheap clothes, kitchen implements and, sometimes, crafts and souvenirs. Many of the larger towns and resorts have covered markets open daily (except Sundays), selling fabulous fresh produce. There are also regular craft markets on summer evenings along much of the coast. Tourist information offices have further details.

7 Hagglng

Hagglng is not practised in the bigger shops and stores, but you can enjoy bargaining

for fresh produce or crafts at market stalls. Smaller shops will probably offer a discount if you wheedle convincingly enough.

8 Sales and Bargains

The annual sales (look for signs saying *Rebajas* or *Rebajas*) are held in January and July/August. Most of the major department stores and some chain stores have a section devoted to *oportunidades*, where you can pick up some bargains if you’re prepared to rummage.

9 Tax-free Shopping

Non-EU citizens are entitled to claim back value-added tax (IVA in Spanish) on goods and services costing over €90. Look for signs in shop windows indicating that they participate in the “Global Refund” scheme. Make sure you get a stamped receipt which shows the IVA component, and claim back the tax when you leave. ☎ www.globalrefund.com

10 Hypermarkets and Shopping Malls

The shopping mall phenomenon has hit Spain in a big way. Every large city and resort will have a shopping mall with supermarkets and all kinds of shops under one roof somewhere on the outskirts of town.





Left City-centre *pensión* Right The balcony of a typical *pensión*

TOP 10 Accommodation Tips

1 Hotels

Hotels are awarded between one and five stars depending on the level of facilities. (Note that this classification system doesn't take into account charm or levels of service.) Tourist offices have comprehensive lists of local hotels.

2 Hostales and Pensiones

These are usually, but not always, at the budget end. They may lack the facilities that hotels offer, but they are often friendlier and very comfortable. Like hotels, they are classified using a star system (from one to three stars).

3 Youth Hostels

There are relatively few youth hostels on the Costa Blanca. Many get booked up with school trips in summer. While they offer very cheap accommodation, they are rarely central and may be no cheaper than a budget *pensión* or *hostal* (particularly if you are travelling in a group). Private hostels are popular with young backpackers.

4 Villa Rentals

Numerous companies offer villa rentals, ranging from simple apartments to quasi-palaces. The Internet and the travel pages of weekend newspapers are good sources of ads and information. It's also worth checking

out the small ads on the online version of the *Costa Blanca News*, a local English-language newspaper. ☎ www.costablanca-news.com

5 Paradors

Paradors (*paradores*) are state-run hotels. They tend to be fairly dear, but they have good facilities and are often set in historic buildings. There are two on the Costa Blanca, both purpose-built; one in Xàbia (Jávea), the other in Puerto Lumbreras. Look out for special deals on the website, especially out of season. ☎ www.parador.es

6 Casas Rurales

Casas rurales – country houses for rent or offering B&B – are a growing phenomenon. They are often located in small inland villages, and vary hugely in terms of facilities. There's a list on the official Costa Blanca website. Noratur has details of *casas rurales* in Murcia. ☎ www.costablanca.org • www.noratur.com

7 Camping and Caravanning

Camping and caravanning are enormously popular on the Costa Blanca. Sites are graded by a star system (one to three) according to the facilities offered. Many of the larger sites have every imaginable facility, while inland sites are often far

less grand. If you want to camp in the Regional Parks of the Sierra de Espuña or Calblanque, contact the park information offices in advance (see also p131).

8 Package Holidays

Package holidays offer great value for money, but you usually end up in the larger resorts, which means that peace and quiet can be in short supply.

9 Booking Services

Tourist offices have details of accommodation but don't provide a booking service, although staff are usually happy to help. The official websites also have accommodation lists (see *Directory*, p112). Otherwise, consult the Spanish tourist office in your home country.

10 Booking Online

There are countless online booking services, many offering substantial discounts on standard prices. It is also worth checking out the websites of big Spanish chains such as Melia and NH-Hoteles for special deals. Almost all hotels can be booked on their own websites. It's wise to follow up online reservations with a phone call. ☎ www.hotelconnect.co.uk • www.hotelopia.co.uk • www.somewhere2stay.com • www.solmelia.com • www.nh-hoteles.com

Left **Huerto del Cura** Right **Hostería de Mont Sant**

TOP 10 Luxury Hotels

1 Hotel Villa Mediterránea, Xàbia (Jávea)

This stunning villa, with just 10 elegant rooms and two suites, is an oasis of tranquility. There are pools indoors and out, a gym, a sauna, a massage room and an excellent restaurant. ☎ *C/León 5 • Map H3 • 965 79 52 33 • www.hotelvillamed.com • €€€€€*

2 Hostería de Mont Sant, Xàtiva (Játiva)

A former monastery tucked below Xàtiva's castle is the idyllic setting for this romantic hotel with pool, gym, sauna and elegant restaurant (see p79). ☎ *Crtra de Castillo s/n • Map E1 • 962 27 50 81 • www.mont-sant.com • €€€-€€€€*

3 Huerto del Cura, Elx (Elche)

This large hotel sits amid the famous palm groves of Elx. The rooms are in bungalows set in luxuriant gardens. The facilities include pool, tennis courts and indoor football. ☎ *Porta de la Morera 14 • Map Q1 • 966 61 00 11 • www.hotelhuertodelcura.com • €€€-€€€€*

4 Hotel Buena Vista, Denia (Dénia)

The rooms of this rosy 19th-century mansion set in beautiful gardens are in dark wood with terracotta tiles and sumptuous fabrics. Most offer

expansive sea views. There's a gym, sauna, pool and paddle tennis court. The restaurant is among the best in the region. ☎ *Partidal Tossalet 82 • Map H2 • 965 78 79 95 • www.buenavista.com • €€€€€*

5 Hotel Palacio Tudemir, Orihuela

Orihuela is a beautiful, historic town, and this hotel occupies a restored 18th-century palace, complete with beamed ceilings and cupola. The restaurant is top-notch. ☎ *C/Alfonso XIII 1 • Map P2 • 96 673 80 10 • www.sh-hoteles.com • €€€€*

6 El Rodat, Xàbia

Part of the Relais et Châteaux group, this charming hotel offers rooms, suites and villas set in jasmine-scented gardens. There are two pools, one indoor, one out; the outdoor pool overlooks the peak of Montgó. ☎ *Crtra Cabo de la Nao s/n • Map H3 • 966 47 07 10 • www.elrodar.com • €€€€€*

7 Hotel El Montiboli, La Vila Joiosa (Villajoyosa)

Perched on a rocky bluff overlooking a cove, the Montiboli has airy rooms with terraces, while the romantic *cabañas* in the Moorish gardens offer more privacy. There are three pools, tennis courts, a gym and sauna. The beach is a few steps

away. Three restaurants serve fine Mediterranean cuisine. ☎ *Partida Montiboli s/n • Map F4 • 965 89 02 50 • www.relaischateaux.com/montiboli • €€€-€€€€€*

8 Hespería Alicante Golf Spa, Alicante (Alacant)

This glossy new development boasts its own 18-hole golf course (designed by Seve Ballesteros, no less) and a fabulous spa. Rooms are smart and modern, with large bathrooms. ☎ *Avda de les Naciones s/n, Playa de San Juan • Map E5 • 965 26 86 00 • www.hoteles-hesperia.com • €€€€€*

9 Hyatt Regency La Manga, nr Cartagena

In the heart of this premier golf resort, the Hyatt Regency is a favourite with sports stars and other celebrities. It is also well geared toward families. ☎ *Los Belones • Map P5 • 968 33 12 34 • www.lamanga.hyatt.com • €€€€€*

10 Hotel Sidi San Juan, Alicante

Perfectly set on the Playa San Juan, this sleek modern hotel with bright rooms (on the small side for the price) has myriad facilities, plus two golf courses close by. ☎ *La Domblada s/n, Playa de San Juan • Map E5 • 965 16 13 00 • www.hotelsidi.es • €€€€-€€€€€*





Palm Beach, Benidorm

Price Categories

For a standard, double room per night (with breakfast if included), taxes and extra charges.	€ under €50
	€€ €50–€100
	€€€ €100–€150
	€€€€ €150–€200
	€€€€€ over €200

10 Resort Hotels

1 Hotel Bali, Benidorm

A giant even by the standards of Benidorm's dizzying skyscrapers, the four-star Hotel Bali, at 186 m (610 ft), is the tallest hotel in Europe. It's worth choosing your room carefully, as not all of them have a balcony or terrace. C/Luis Prendes s/n • Map G4 • 966 81 52 00 • www.granhotelbali.com • €€–€€€€

2 Palm Beach, Benidorm

For Benidorm at its most flamboyant, try this enormous hotel packed with enjoyably kitsch details. All the usual facilities, plus a special children's play area. C/Viena 2 • Map G4 • 965 85 04 00 • www.palm-beach-hotel.com • €€

3 NH Hotel Cristal, Alicante (Alacant)

A sleek chain hotel with a striking glass façade and lobby, in the heart of Alicante yet still handy for the beaches. It's geared toward business travellers, so look out for good deals at weekends and out of season. C/López Torregrosa 9 • Map E5 • 965 14 36 59 • www.nh-hotels.es • €€

4 Roca Esmeralda, (Calp) Calpe

This newcomer sits right on the Levante beach, and offers bright, modern rooms. Choose from no fewer than four pools

(one indoors and three out, including one for kids). Watersports arranged on request. C/Ponent 1 (Playa de Levante) • Map G3 • 965 83 61 01 • www.rocaesmeralda.com • €€–€€€

5 Melia Altea Hills, Altea

This striking modern complex set on the edge of the pretty village of Altea, has five-star amenities – notably, enormous bathrooms and spectacular sea views. The hotel is surrounded by tropical gardens and boasts an outdoor pool, sports centre and spa. C/Suecia s/n • Map G4 • 966 88 10 06 • www.solmelia.com • €€€€–€€€€€

6 Don Ximo Club Hotel, Gandia-Playa

A large, ochre-painted complex set around a pool, with plush rooms. Facilities include tennis court, football pitch, gym and outdoor pool. The only drawback is that it's about 1 km (half a mile) to the beach. Partida de la Redonda • Map F1 • 962 84 53 93 • www.hoteldonximo.com • €€

7 Barceló Lodomar, Lo Pagán

A vast complex of rooms and apartments, with pools, gym and a spa specializing in thalassotherapy. The hotel sits on the edge of the San Pedro del Pinatar

Regional Park, a paradise for bird-watchers. The Mar Menor beaches are about 500 m (547 yards) away. Rio Bidasoa • Map P4 • 968 18 68 02 • www.barcelo.com • €€

8 La Sella Golf Resort and Spa

Overlooking the prestigious La Sella golf course in the foothills of the Montgó Natural Park, this is one of the most luxurious resorts in the whole region. The spa is one of the finest in Spain. C/Alquería de Fernando • Map H2 • 966 45 40 54 • www.marriott.com • €€€–€€€€€

9 Oliva Nova Golf, Oliva

A handsome seafront complex, the Oliva Nova is set around an 18-hole golf course designed by Seve Ballesteros. Most rooms and suites have sea views. Some even have private pools. Urb. Oliva Nova s/n • Map G2 • 962 85 76 00 • www.olivanova.com • €€€

10 Los Limineros, Moraira

This pretty, medium-sized hotel has villa-style rooms, a swimming pool, and a decent restaurant. The attentive staff can arrange excursions to nearby attractions. It's a 10-minute walk to the beach and the centre of Moraira. C/Mar del Norte 20 • Map H3 • 966 49 03 51 • www.loslimineros.com • €€

Left **Huerto de la Virgen de las Nieves** Right **Posada del Mar**

Top 10 Stylish Hotels

1 Molí del Canyisset, La Font d'En Carròs

Converted from a 17th-century rice mill, this spectacular hotel (with pool) mixes traditional and ultra-modern styles. Some of the rooms are wheelchair-accessible. The restaurant serves good regional dishes. ☎ *Map F2 • 962 83 32 17 • www.hotelcanyisset.com • €€€*

2 Huerto de la Virgen de las Nieves, Xàtiva (Játiva)

This rosy-pink *finca* is surrounded by orchards and pine groves. Each of the six rooms and suites is filled with antiques and paintings. The excellent restaurant specializes in Valencian rice dishes. It makes a good base for exploring beautiful Xàtiva, hiking in the sierras, or just relaxing by the pool. ☎ *Avda de la Huerta 10 • Map E1 • 962 28 70 58 • www.huertodelavirgendelasnieves.com • €€-€€€*

3 Hotel Casa Lehmi, Tàrbena

This beautifully restored *finca* is set in mountains about 20 km (12 miles) from the coast. There are just eight spacious and very elegant rooms in an adjoining annexe. The excellent facilities include pool, tennis court and sauna. ☎ *Partida El Buscarro 1-3 • Map G3 • 965 88 40 18 • www.casalehmi.com • €€€€€*

4 NH Rincón de Pepe, Murcia City

Easily the most stylish city hotel in Murcia, it exudes an air of old-fashioned formality. The celebrated cocktail and tapas bar "La Muralla" is built around the original Arabic wall. Its restaurant (see p109) is one of the best in the region. ☎ *C/Apóstoles 34 • Map U6 • 968 21 22 39 • www.nh-hotels.com • €€€-€€€€*

5 Casa del Maco, Benissa

This luxurious country hideaway in the foothills of the Lleus Valley has just four rooms, with beamed ceilings. There's a large terrace and pool. The romantic restaurant serves fine French cuisine. ☎ *Pou Roig s/n • Map G3 • 965 73 28 42 • www.casadelmaco.com • €-€€*

6 Hostal La Estació, Bocairent

An eccentric former railway station, with one room adapted for disabled guests. Nice touches include aromatherapy kits and fruit baskets in each room. Well located for the nearby Sierra Mariola. ☎ *Parc de l'Estació • Map D3 • 962 35 00 00 • www.hotelestacio.com • €€-€€€*

7 Finca El Almendral, Relleu

Each of the rooms in this beguiling hotel is named after one of the deadly sins, and is decorated accordingly. Stroll through

almond groves, hike through the mountains, or be sinfully slothful by the pool. ☎ *Partida El Terme • Map F4 • 966 20 01 17 • www.almendral.com • €€-€€€*

8 La Casa Vieja, Rugat

Beautiful rooms, attentive service and thoughtful details make La Casa Vieja the perfect country retreat. There's a huge fireplace to huddle round in winter, an excellent restaurant, and a pool. ☎ *C/Horno 4 • Map F2 • 962 81 40 13 • www.lacasa vieja.com • €€-€€€*

9 Posada del Mar, Denia (Dénia)

A medieval mansion has been restored to house this stylish hotel, with 16 rooms and nine suites, some with spectacular terraces. Each room is individually decorated with an elegant mixture of old and new. ☎ *Plaza Drassanes 2 • Map H2 • 966 43 29 66 • www.laposada delmar.com • €€€-€€€€€*

10 Pensión Oliva, Oliva

On the fringes of maze-like old Oliva, this pretty inn has five simple but stylish rooms. Breakfast is served at a long wooden table on the terrace. Two rooms are suitable for families, one is wheelchair-accessible. ☎ *C/San Luís 35 • Map G2 • 653 60 69 14 • www.pensionoliva.com • €*





Hotel Sur

Price Categories

For a standard,	€ under €50
double room per	€€ €50–€100
night (with breakfast	€€€ €100–€150
if included), taxes	€€€€ €150–€200
and extra charges.	€€€€€ over €200

10 Seaside Charmers

1 Hotel Casa del Gobernador, Isla Tabarca

Escape the hubbub of the resorts and appreciate the tranquil beauty of the Isla Tabarca (see pp24–5) at this 18th-century former governor's mansion. It's been unsympathetically modernized, but retains some charm. Map E6 • 965 96 08 86 • €€

2 Hotel Sur, Calabardina

A delightful hotel in a quiet village. Arches and terraces give the place a seductive Arabic feel. There is no restaurant or pool, but uncrowded beaches are just steps away, and there are plenty of local places to eat and drink. C/Torre de Cope 24 • Map L6 • 968 41 94 66 • €€

3 Hotel Rosa, Denia (Dénia)

Just 20 m (66 ft) from the beach, this modern hotel is perfect for families. Kids will love the big pool (with toddlers' area). Choose from rooms or self-catering bungalows. There's a reasonably priced restaurant. C/Marinas 197 • Map H2 • 965 78 15 73 • €€

4 Hotel Jávea, Xàbia (Jávea)

This classic seaside hotel just steps from the old port in Xàbia has friendly staff and functional but spotless rooms – the nicest have balconies

overlooking the port and pebbly beach. C/Pío X 5 • Map H3 • 965 79 54 61 • €

5 Hostal Loreto, Denia

This congenial, family-run hotel tucked away in the picturesque old quarter of Denia is housed in a former convent dating back more than four centuries. The staff are charming. The rooms are modest, but perfectly well equipped. The best have balconies overlooking the narrow street below. C/Loreto 12 • Map H2 • 966 43 54 19 • www.hostalloreto.com • €–€€

6 La Racona, Denia

Overlooking the beautiful coves of Las Rotes, and on the fringes of the fabulous Montgó Natural Park, this family-run hotel has rooms and self-catering bungalows, most with views of the sea or the mountains. There's a small gym, a pool, tennis courts and a restaurant. Camí Ample 19, Ctra Las Rotes • Map H2 • 965 78 79 60 • www.hotel-laracona.com • €€

7 Hotel Gema, Teulada-Moraira

A simple hotel set in gardens, with swimming pool. Relaxed, friendly and ideal for families. There's a cheerful café-bar and restaurant. The beach is just 300 m (330 yards) away. Cabo Estaca de Bares 11 • Map H3 • 965 74 71 88 • €€

8 Villas La Manga, La Manga del Mar Menor

This swanky development beside the Mar Menor offers 60 luxurious "mini-suites" in whitewashed villas. There's a restaurant and a café, plus pools for adults and children. The beaches of the Mar Menor are only 30 m (100 ft) away – those of the Mediterranean, just a little further in the other direction. Gran Vía Km 3 • Map Q4 • 968 14 52 22 • www.villaslamanga.es • €€€

9 Parador de Jávea, Xàbia

This bland and boxy 1970s four-star parador has a stunning setting right on the beach, and it's surrounded by lush tropical gardens. The large, light rooms have terraces overlooking the Mediterranean. Facilities include pool, gym and sauna. There's a fine restaurant. Avda del Mediterráneo 7 • Map H3 • 965 79 02 00 • www.parador.es • €€€–€€€€

10 Balneario La Encarnación, Los Alcázares

Entering this winsome former spa hotel on the Mar Menor is like stepping back in time. The rooms are simple but charming, the service delightfully old-fashioned and courteous. C/Condesta 8 • Map P4 • 968 57 50 04 • €€



Hotel Termas

TOP 10 Mountain Retreats

1 Pou Clar, Ontinyent

In the heart of historic Ontinyent, this hotel is functional but friendly. The village is a great base for exploring the sierras, which are dotted with natural springs and swimming holes. ☎ *C/Mayáns 67 • Map E2 • 962 38 12 00 • €€*

2 Hospedería Molino de Argos, nr Caravaca de la Cruz

A 15th-century mill on the banks of the River Argos has been converted to house six apartments and a double room. There's a pool, a terrace with fountains, orchards, and endless rolling sierras right on the doorstep. ☎ *Camino Viejo de Archivel • Map K2 • 968 43 33 81 • www.molinelorio.com • €€€*

3 Hotel Les Frares, Quatretondeta

Get away from it all in this tiny mountain village of just 150 inhabitants. All-in walking holidays, plus a self-catering cottage. ☎ *Avda País Valenciano 20 • Map F3 • 965 51 12 34 • www.mountainwalks.com • €€*

4 Pension Castells, Castell de Castells

This utterly charming mountain inn is run by a friendly British couple. Delicious local cuisine is accompanied by wine straight from the barrel. Also on offer are tailor-made walking, biking and

activity holidays. ☎ *C/San Vicente 18 • Map F3 • 965 51 82 54 • www.mountainholidays-spain.com • €€*

5 Hotel Termas, Archena

The oldest and grandest hotel in this palm-shaded spa village has rather characterless rooms, but its public areas are redolent of a glorious past. The hotel specializes in health and beauty packages, including massage, reflexology and thalassotherapy. ☎ *Balneario de Archena • Map M2 • 968 68 80 22 • www.balneariodearchena.com • €€-€€€*

6 Hotel Santa Elena, nr Ontinyent

There are just six rooms at this country hotel nestling amid olive groves. Romantics can request a four-poster and huge bath made for two. There are walking trails nearby, plus an excellent restaurant and a pool. ☎ *Ctra Ontinyent-Fontenars Km 9, Partida de la Umbria • Map D3 • 962 91 16 56 • www.santaelenahotel.com • €€€*

7 Hospedería Casazul, La Paca

Boasting wonderful views, the "Blue House" is set in orchards on the outskirts of historic Lorca. The restaurant specializes in local dishes. Staff can arrange sporting activities. ☎ *Casa de Don Gonzalo, Ctra Lorca-Caravaca • Map K3 • 968 49 16 82 • €-€€*

8 Hospedería Rural Molino de Felipe, Mula

One of the last working flour mills in Spain, this is also a wonderful hotel. The restaurant offers local Murcian specialties, as well as bread baked from flour ground on the premises. There's walking in the nearby Sierra Espuña, and a refreshing pool. ☎ *Paraje Ribera de los Molinos • Map L2 • 968 66 20 13 • www.paralelo40.org/molinfelipe • €*

9 Barceló Cenajo, Moratalla

In a region with limited accommodation options, this historic, primrose-yellow hotel is set about 10 km (6 miles) from the village, on the shores of a lake. Facilities include swimming pools, tennis and squash courts, and a gym. It's a good base for hiking, biking and riding around the surrounding sierras. ☎ *Embalse del Cenajo s/n • Map K1 • 968 72 10 11 • €-€€*

10 Mas de Pau, nr Penáguila

This handsome farmhouse set in the remote valley of Penáguila is surrounded by dramatic mountain scenery. Rooms are on the small side; the five bungalows are a better bet. There's a bar and restaurant (both popular with locals), a pool, and a fitness area. ☎ *Ctra Alcoy-Penáguila Km 9 • Map F3 • 965 51 31 58 • €€*





Hotel El Paraíso

Price Categories

For a standard,	€ under €50
double room per	€€ €50–€100
night (with breakfast	€€€ €100–€150
if included), taxes	€€€€ €150–€200
and extra charges.	€€€€€ over €200

10 Budget Hotels

1 Hotel Los Ángeles, Benidorm

A friendly two-star hotel in the heart of Benidorm's old quarter, this is a better bet than the enormous, impersonal high-rise hotels. There's a simple café-bar, popular with locals, and the rooms are very good value. ☎ *C/ Los Ángeles 3 • Map G4 • 966 80 74 33 • €–€€*

2 La Huertanica, Murcia City

Tucked down a quiet street in the heart of the city, this is one of the best bargains on the Costa Blanca. The rooms, though impersonal, are well equipped, and the bathrooms are stuffed with goodies worthy of an expensive hotel. There's a good bar and restaurant, and staff are unfailingly helpful and courteous. ☎ *C/ Infantes 3–5 • Map U5 • 968 21 76 68 • €–€€*

3 Los Habaneros, Cartagena

Sitting at the entrance to old Cartagena, this classic hotel is excellent value. The comfortable rooms are rather bland, but the restaurant is renowned throughout town. ☎ *C/San Diego 60 • Map P5 • 968 50 52 50 • www.hotelhabaneros.com • €€*

4 Pensión Marina, Xàbia (Jávea)

This sweet, tiny *pensión* right on the seafront in the old port of Xàbia

offers no frills (except en suite bathrooms), but the location is perfect. Out of season, prices drop even further. ☎ *Avda de la Marina Española 8 • Map H3 • 965 79 31 39 • €€*

5 Hotel San Miguel, Altea

This whitewashed seaside hotel has a popular restaurant serving plain but delicious meals. A huge terrace offers wonderful views of the sea and the buzzy promenade below. ☎ *C/Mar 65 • Map G4 • 965 84 04 00 • €–€€*

6 Hotel El Paraíso, nr Cabo Cope

A modest hotel bedecked with window boxes, in one of the most delightful small resorts on the Costa Cálida. Rooms are basic but well-equipped, with air-conditioning, telephone and TV. There's a pleasant garden terrace, decent restaurant and bar. ☎ *Ctra Cabo Cope–Calabardina • Map L6 • 968 41 94 44 • www.hotelparaíso.net • €€*

7 Hostal Les Monges Palace, Alicante (Alacant)

You'll need to book early for this wonderfully quirky *pensión*, housed in a former convent in the heart of the old city. The corridors are lined with works of art (including a Dalí sketch), and some rooms boast jacuzzis or four-posters. ☎ *C/San Agustín 4 • Map U2 • 965 21 50 46 • €*

8 Hotel Madrid, Águilas

This turn-of-the-20th-century hotel has seen better days, but the old-fashioned rooms still retain some charm. The bar, an unreconstructed 1960s classic, is fabulous. The delightful owners (an Anglo-Spanish couple) couldn't be friendlier. They host regular dinner dances and live music events. The restaurant serves tasty home cooking. ☎ *Plaza Robles Vives 4 • Map L6 • 968 41 11 09 • €–€€*

9 El Pequeño Paraíso, Xàbia

A charming Belgian couple run this appealing B&B in a whitewashed villa surrounded by palm trees. The swimming pool is huge. Each room has its own terrace, where a delicious breakfast is served. ☎ *Ctra La Guardia 173 • Map H3 • 965 77 03 56 • www.villacasas.com • €€*

10 Hotel Casa Pic Negre, Cocentaina

Cocentaina is a large industrial town in the foothills of the Sierra Mariola, with a beautiful, faded medieval core. It's a good base for walking. This traditional stone house has been converted into a simple *pensión*, with just six basic rooms, all with bathrooms. ☎ *C/Major 36 • Map E3 • 966 50 12 05 • €*



Left Alquiler de Estudios Right Las Lomas Village and Spa



TOP 10 Self-Catering

1 Alquiler de Estudios, Alicante (Alacant)

An ingenious mix of hotel rooms and self-catering accommodation, set in Alicante's seductive old quarter. The four pristine studios have large en-suite bathrooms and small kitchen areas. Three larger apartments are also available. ☎ *C/San José 5* • Map U2 • 965 14 01 12 • www.casasannicolas.com

2 Casa La Calçada, Bocairent

This beautiful *casa rural* in the lovely medieval quarter of Bocairent has a well-equipped kitchen and dining room, plus bunk beds (sleeping six). Perfect for families. ☎ *Map D3* • 653 08 21 02 • www.bocairent-turistic.com

3 Letting in Spain

This online company lets villas, apartments and bungalows around Torrevieja. Airport pickups are included in the price. Most properties are in the modern Ciudad Quesada resort, which has its own golf course, and is close to beaches and the Lagunas de la Mata. ☎ *Avda de las Naciones 1-6, Ciudad Quesada-Rojales* • Map Q3 • 965 72 54 10 • www.lettinginspain.com

4 Casa Calixto III, Xàtiva (Játiva)

This *casa rural* is a handsome town house close to the cathedral in

historic Xàtiva. Two double rooms and a quadruple make it perfect for families or larger groups. ☎ *Pza Calixto III 8* • Map E1 • 647 01 81 67

5 Granja San Miguel, Salem

This 200-year-old *casa rural* in a remote village is part of a riding stables, so it's ideal for riders. The five delightful double rooms can be rented individually. There are shared kitchen facilities, or you can eat at the restaurant. ☎ *C/Benicadell 10* • Map E2 • 962 88 35 15 • www.casasanmiguel.com

6 Mas de Monserrat, nr Moixent

This rural hotel has nine rooms and suites, plus a self-catering apartment and bungalow. You can use the hotel's facilities, which include a pool, tennis courts, and a play area for children. Staff can organize horse riding, and help plan walking routes in the surrounding sierras. ☎ *Ctra Moixent-Fontanars Km 9* • Map D2 • 962 13 24 24 or 645 38 43 31 • www.masmonserrat.com

7 Las Lomas Village and Spa, Los Belones

For the ultimate in luxurious self-catering accommodation, look no further than Las Lomas, part of the prestigious La Manga resort. The 60 or so apartments are clustered round a golf

course, and a fabulous spa offers the latest treatments. ☎ *Campo de Golf* • Map P5 • 968 33 12 34 • www.lamanga.laslomas.hyatt.com

8 La Muralia, Cehegín

A pretty, whitewashed hotel at the very top of this magical village offers eight rooms and 10 stylishly decorated self-catering apartments. The views across the ochre rooftops are breathtaking. ☎ *Plaza del Castillo s/n* • Map K2 • 968 72 35 28 • www.lamuralia-hotel.com

9 Casas Rurales, Caravaca de la Cruz

Set in gardens and orchards just outside the beautiful town of Caravaca de la Cruz, these well-equipped houses and apartments are grouped around a pool and barbecue area. Stylishly decorated, they sleep between two and 12 people. ☎ *Map K2* • 968 70 03 52 • www.solorural.com

10 Owners Direct

This web-based company offers villas and apartments throughout the Costa Blanca, booked directly through the owners. Some places can be booked for as little as one night. The website also advertises B&B accommodation and guesthouses. ☎ www.ownersdirect.co.uk





Left **Camping Xàtiva** Right **Sierra de Espuña**: wooden *cabañas*

10 Camping and Caravanning

1 Sierra de Espuña
There are three very basic camping areas within the stunning Regional Park of the Sierra de Espuña; apart from four mountain refuges (see p20), they are the only accommodation options within the park itself, and must be booked in advance from the park information office. Just outside the park, Camping Sierra Espuña has extensive facilities, including wooden *cabañas* for rent. Map L3 • Visitor centre (Centro Ricardo Cordoniu): Parque Regional Sierra Espuña. 968 43 14 30. www.sierraespuna.com • Camping Sierra Espuña: El Berro. 968 66 80 38. www.campingsierraespuna.com

2 Camping Bella Vista, Águilas
A big, friendly site 300 m (984 ft) from the beach, with shop, bar-restaurant, children's play area and table tennis. Wheelchair-accessible bungalows are also available. Open all year. Ctra de la Vera Km 3 • Map L6 • 968 44 91 51 • www.campingbellavista.com

3 Camping El Molino, Alicante (Alacant)
Close to glorious San Juan beach, this site has all the usual amenities. There are some trees for shade, but they're on the thin side in scorching high summer. Open all year. Playa de San Juan • Map E5 • 965 65 24 80

4 Camping Xàtiva
This attractive site, just outside historic Xàtiva (Játiva), has a fantastic pool, lots of shady pitches and a laundry, but little else. It's an excellent base for mountain biking, hiking or sightseeing. Ctra Genovés-Xàtiva • Map E1 • 962 27 14 62

5 Caravanning-Camping Villasol, Benidorm
This enormous site, only a few minutes' walk from the beach, is a virtual village. The facilities include two pools (one heated in winter), bars, a restaurant, satellite TV, supermarket, laundry and play areas. The site also rents out mobile homes. Camino Viejo de Valencia • Map G4 • 965 85 04 22 • www.camping-villasol.com

6 Camping La Marina, La Marina
This huge campsite in a seaside resort south of Santa Pola has every facility, from children's play areas, gym and large pool to hairdresser and on-site medical staff. Ctra N-332a Km76 • Map Q2 • 965 41 92 00 • www.campinglamarina.com

7 La Puerta, Moratalla
This sleepy medieval village offers little visitor accommodation aside from this large campsite, set among trees close to the river. As well as tent

and caravan pitches, it rents out cabins. Facilities include bar, restaurant, supermarket and laundry. Ctra La Puerta • Map K1 • 968 73 00 08

8 Calblanque
The Regional Park of Calblanque (see pp8-9) incorporates one of the region's wildest stretches of coast. Camping is permitted in one area, and you must book in advance. The site is very basic, but the proximity of the stunning beaches (just across the dunes) more than compensates. Visitor information centre, La Jordana • Map P5 • 968 29 84 23

9 Camping Los Delfines, Playa Mojón
This huge site has big pitches on the beach near Puerto de Mazarrón resort. It also rents out wooden bungalows. The site is accessible for disabled travellers. Ctra Isla Plana, Playa Mojón, Puerto de Mazarrón • Map M5 • 968 59 45 27

10 Camping Mariola, nr Bocairent
Set amid mountains and almond groves, this attractive site has shady pitches and cabins for rent. Activities available in the area include hiking, river rafting, and hot-air ballooning. Ctra Bocairent-Alcoi • Map E3 • 962 13 51 60 • www.campingmariola.com



Note: Campsites are always a budget option, though prices do vary according to the season. Contact individual sites for prices.



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Acknowledgements

The Author

Mary-Ann Gallagher is based in Barcelona, and has written and contributed to more than a dozen guidebooks on Spain.

Muchas gracias to Emma, Andy, Chris, Tony and Jesús at the Spanish tourist office in London, Victoria and Alfonso in Alicante, Guillermo, and all the kind staff at restaurants, hotels and tourist information offices across the Costa Blanca region.

Produced by DP Services, a division of
DUNCAN PETERSEN PUBLISHING LTD,
31 Ceylon Road, London W14 0PY

Project Editor Chris Barstow
Designer Ian Midson
Picture Researcher Lily Sellar
Listings Researcher Guillermo Tascón
Indexer Hilary Bird
Proofreader Yoko Kawaguchi

Main Photographer Antony Souter
Additional Photography John Miller and
Susannah Saylor

Illustrator Chapel Design & Marketing

Maps James Macdonald (Mapping Ideas Ltd)

FOR DORLING KINDERSLEY
Publishing Manager Kate Poole
Managing Editor Fay Franklin
Senior Cartographic Editor Casper Morris
DTP Jason Little
Production Rita Sinha

Picture Credits

Placement Key: t-top; tc-top centre; tl-top left; tr-top right; cla-centre left above; ca-centre above; cra-centre right above; cl-centre left; c-centre; cr-centre right; clb-centre left below; cb-centre below; crb-centre right below; bl-below left; bc-below centre; br-below right; b-bottom.

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Phrase Book: Spanish

In an Emergency

Help!	¡Socorro!	soh-koh-roh
Stop!	¡Pare!	pah-reh
Call a doctor.	¡llame a un médico!	yah-meh ah oon meh-de-koh
Call an ambulance.	¡llame a una ambulancia!	yah-meh ah ahm-boo-lahn-thee-ah
Call the police.	¡llame a la policía!	yah-meh ah lah poh-lee-thee-ah
Call the fire brigade.	¡llame a los bomberos!	yah-meh ah lohsh boh-m-beh-rohs

Communication Essentials

Yes/No	Sí/No	see/noh
Please	Por favor	pohr fah-vorh
Thank you	Gracias	grah-thee-ahs
Excuse me	Perdone	pehr-doh-neh
Hello	Hola	oh-lah
Goodbye	Adiós	ah-dee-ohs
Good night	Buenas noches	bweh-nahs noh-chehs
What?	¿Qué?	keh?
When?	¿Cuándo?	kwan-doh?
Why?	¿Por qué?	pohr-keh?
Where?	¿Dónde?	dohn-deh?

Useful Phrases

How are you?	Cómo está usted?	koh-moh ehs-tah oos-tehd
Very well, thank you.	Muy bien, gracias.	mwee bee-ehh
Pleased to meet you.	Encantado/a de conocerle.	grah-thee-ahs ehn-kahn-tah-doh deh koh-noh-thehr-leh
That's fine.	Está bien.	ehs-tah bee-ehh
Where is/are ...?	¿Dónde está/están?	dohn-deh ehs-tah/ehs-tahn
Which way to ...?	¿Por dónde se va a ...?	pohr dohn-deh seh bah ah
Do you speak English?	¿Habla inglés?	ah-blah een-glehsh
I don't understand.	No comprendo.	noh kom-prehn-doh
I'm sorry.	Lo siento.	loh see-ehh-toh

Shopping

How much does this cost?	¿Cuánto cuesta esto?	kwahn-toh kwehs-tah
I would like ...	Me gustaría ...	ehs-toh meh goos-ta-ree-ah
Do you have ...?	¿Tienen ...?	tee-yeh-nehn
Do you take credit cards?	¿Aceptan tarjetas de crédito?	ah-thehp-than tahr-heh-tas-deh kreh-dee-toh
What time do you open/close?	A qué hora abren/cierran?	ah keh oh-rah ah-brehn/thee-eh-rah
this one/that one	éste/ése	ehs-teh/eh-seh
expensive	caro	kahr-oh
cheap	barato	bah-rah-toh
size (clothes)	talla	tah-yah
size (shoes)	número	noo-mehr-roh
white	blanco	blahn-koh
black	negro	neh-groh
red	rojo	roh-hoh
yellow	amarillo	ah-mah-ree-yoh

green	verde	behr-deh
blue	azul	ah-thool
bakery	la panadería	lah pah-nah-deh-ree-ah
bank	el banco	ehl bahn-koh
bookshop	la librería	lah lee-bre-ree-ah
cake shop	la pastelería	lah pahs-teh-leh-ree-ah
chemist	la farmacia	lah fahr-mah-thee-ah
grocer's	la tienda de de comestibles	lah tee-yehn-dah deh koh-mehs-tee-blehs
hairdresser	la peluquería	lah peh-loo-keh-ree-ah
market	el mercado	ehl mehr-kah-doh
newsagent	el kiosko	ehh kee-ohs-koh
supermarket	de prensa el supermercado	deh prehn-sah ehl soo-pehr-mehr-kah-doh
travel agency	la agencia de viajes	lah ah-hehn-thee-ah deh bee-ah-hehs

Sightseeing

art gallery	la galería d'arte	lah gah-leh-ree-ah dahr-teh
bus station	la estación de autobuses	lah ehs-tah-ee-ohn deh owtoh-boos-sehs
cathedral church	la catedral la iglesia/la basílica	lah kah-teh-drahl lah ee-gleh-see-ah/lah bah-seel-i-kah
closed for holidays	cerrado por vacaciones	thehr-rah-doh porhr bah-kah-cee-oh-nehs
garden	el jardín	ehl hahr-deen
museum	el museo	ehl moo-seh-oh
railway station	la estación de trenes	lah ehs-tah-thee-ohn deh treh-nehs
tourist information	la oficina de turismo	lah oh-fee-thee-nah deh too-rees-moh

Staying in a Hotel

Do you have any vacant rooms?	¿Tienen una habitación libre?	tee-eh-nehn oo-nah ah-bee-tah thee-ohn lee-bre
double room	Habitación doble	ah-bee-tah-thee-ohn dob-bleh
with double bed	con cama de matrimonio	kohn kah-mah deh mah-tree-moh-nee-oh
twin room	Habitación con dos camas	ah-bee-tah-thee-ohn kohn dohs kah-mahs
single room	Habitación individual	ah-bee-tah-thee-ohn een-dee-vee-doo-ahl
room with a bath/shower	Habitación con baño/ducha	ah-bee-tah-thee-ohn kohn bah-nyoh/doo-chah
I have a reservation.	Tengo una habitación reservada.	tehn-goh oo-na ah-bee-tah-thee-ohn reh-sehr-bah-dah

Eating Out

Have you got a table for ...?

¿Tienen mesa para ... ?

Tee-eh-nehn
meh-sah
pah-rah

I'd like to reserve a table.

Quiero reservar una mesa.

kee-eh-roh reh-sehr-bahr oo-nah meh-sah

breakfast

el desayuno

ehl deh-sah-yoo-noh

lunch

la comida/ el almuerzo

lah koh-mee-dah/ehl ahl-mwehr-thoh

dinner

la cena

lah theh-nah

The bill,

La cuenta, por favor.

lah kwehn-tah

please.

camerero/

pohr fah-vohr

waiter/waitress

camerera

kah-mah-reh-rah

fixed price

menú del día

meh-noo dehl

menu

el plato del día

dee-ah

dish of the day

los entremeses

ehl plah-toh

starters

el primer plato

dehl dee-ah

main course

la carta de vinos

lohs ehn-treh-meh-sehs

wine list

un vaso

ehl pree-mehr

glass

una botella

plah-toh

bottle

un cuchillo

lah kahr-tah deh

knife

un tenedor

bee-nohs

fork

una cuchara

oon bah-soh

spoon

el café

oon-nah boh-teh-yah

coffee

poco hecho

oon koo-chee-yoh

rare

medio hecho

oon the-neh-dohr

medium

muy hecho

oon-ah koo-chah-rah

well done

el café

ehl kah-feh

Menu Decoder

al horno

ahl ohr-noh

baked

asado

ah-sah-do

roast

el aceite

ah-thee-eh-teh

oil

aceitunas

ah-theh-toon-ahs

olives

el agua mineral

ah-gwa mee-neh-rah

mineral water

sin gas/con gas

seen gas/kohn gas

still/sparkling

el ajo

ah-hoh

garlic

el arroz

ahr-rohth

rice

el azúcar

ah-thoo-kahr

sugar

la carne

kahr-ne

meat

la cebolla

theh-boh-yah

onion

la cerveza

thehr-beh-thah

beer

el cerdo

thehr-doh

pork

el chocolate

choh-koh-lah-the

chocolate

el chorizo

choh-ree-thoh

red sausage

el cordero

kohr-deh-roh

lamb

el fiambre

fee-ahm-bre

cold meat

frito

free-toh

fried

la fruta

froo-tah

fruit

los frutos secos

frooh-tohs seh-kohs

nuts

las gambas

gahm-bas

prawns

el helado

eh-lah-doh

ice-cream

el huevo

oo-eh-voh

egg

el jamón

hah-mohn

cured ham

serrano

sehr-rah-noh

sherry

el jerez

heh-rehz

sherry

la langosta

lahn-gohs-tah

lobster

la leche

leh-cheh

milk

el limón

lee-mohn

lemon

la limonada

lee-moh-nah-dah

lemonade

la mantequilla

mahn-teh-kee-yah

butter

la manzana

mahn-tah-nah

apple

los mariscos

mah-rees-kohs

shellfish

la menestra

meh-nehs-trah

vegetable stew

la naranja

nah-rah-nah

orange

el pan

pahn

bread

el pastel

pahs-tehl

cake

las patatas

pah-tah-thas

potatoes

el pescado

pehs-kah-doh

fish

la pimienta

pee-mee-yehn-tah

pepper

el plátano

plah-tah-noh

banana

el pollo

poh-yoh

chicken

el postre

pohs-treh

dessert

el queso

keh-soh

cheese

la sal

sahl

salt

las salchichas

sahl-chee-chahs

sausages

la salsa

sahl-sa

sauce

seco

seh-koh

dry

el solomillo

soh-loh-mee-yoh

sirloin

la sopa

soh-pah

soup

la tarta

tahr-ta

tart

el té

teh

tea

la ternera

tehr-neh-rah

beef

las tostadas

tohs-tah-dahs

toast

el vinagre

bee-nah-gre

vinegar

el vino blanco

bee-noh blahn-koh

white wine

el vino rosado

bee-noh roh-sah-doh

rosé wine

el vino tinto

bee-noh teen-toh

red wine

Numbers

0

cero

theh-roh

1

un

oon-noh

2

dos

dohs

3

tres

trehs

4

cuatro

kwa-troh

5

cinco

theen-koh

6

seis

says

7

siete

see-eh-teh

8

ocho

oh-choh

9

nueve

nweh-veh

10

diez

dee-ehth

11

once

ohn-theh

12

doce

doh-theh

13

trece

treh-theh

14

trece

kah-tohr-theh

15

quince

keen-theh

16

dieciseis

dee-eh-thee-seh-ess



Phrase Book: Valencian

In an Emergency

Help!	iAuxili!	ow-gzee-lee
Stop!	iPareu!	pah-reh-oo
Call a doctor.	iTelefoneu un metge!	teh-leh-fon-eh oo oom meh-djuh
Call an ambulance.	iTelefoneu una ambulància!	teh-leh-fon-eh-oo oo-nah ahm-booh-lahn-see-ah
Call the police.	iTelefoneu la policia!	teh-leh-fon-eh-oo lah poh-lee-see-ah
Call the fire brigade.	iTelefoneu los bombers!	teh-leh-fon-eh-lohs boh-m-behrs

Communication Essentials

Yes/No	Sí/No	see/noh
Please	Si us plau	si us plau
Thank you	Gràcies	grah-see-uhs
Excuse me	Perdoni	puhr-thoh-nee
Hello	Hola	oh-lah
Goodbye	Adéu	ah-they-oo
Good night	Bona nit	bo-nah neet
Yesterday	ahir	ah-ee
Today	avui	un-voo-ee
Tomorrow	demà	duh-mah
What?	¿Què?	keh?
When?	¿Quan?	kwahn
Why?	¿Per què?	puhr keh
Where?	¿On?	ohn

Useful Phrases

How are you?	¿Cómo està?	kohm uhs-tah
Very well, thank you.	Molt bé, gràcies.	mol beh grah-see-uhs
Pleased to meet you	Molt de gust.	mod duh goost
That's fine.	Està bé.	uhs-tah beh
Where is/are ...?	¿On és/són ...?	ohn ehs/sohn
Which way to ...?	¿Per on es ...?	puhr on uhs
Do you speak English?	¿Parla anglès?	par-luh an-gleh-s
I don't understand.	No l'entenc.	noh luhn-teng
I'm sorry.	Ho sento.	oo sehn-too

Shopping

How much does this cost?	¿Quant costa això?	kwahn kost ehs-shoh
I would like ...	M'agradaria ...	muh-grah-thuh-ree-ah
Do you have ...?	¿Tenen ...?	tehn-un
Do you take credit cards?	¿Accepten targes de crèdit?	Ak-sehp-tuhn tahr-zhuhs duh kreh-deet
What time do you open/close?	A quina hora obren/tanquen?	Ah keen-uh oh-ruh oh-bruhn/tan-kuhn
this one/that one	aquest/aquell	Ah-ket/Ah-kehl
expensive	car	kahr
cheap	bé de preu/barat	be thuh preh-oo/bah-rat
size (clothes)	talla/mida	tah-lyah/mee-thuh
size (shoes)	número	noo-mehr-oo
white	blanc	blang
black	negre	neh-gruh
red	vermell	vuh-mel
yellow	groc	groc

green
blue
bakery
bank
bookshop

cake shop

chemist

grocer's

hairdresser's

market
newsagent

supermarket

travel agency

Sightseeing

art gallery	la galeria d'art	lah gahl-luh-ree-yah dart
bus station	l'estació de autobusos	luhs-tah-see-oh dow-toh-boo-zoos
cathedral	la catedral	lah kuh-tuh-thrahl
church	la església/la basílica	luhz-gleh-zee-uh/lah-buh-zee-lee-kuh
closed for holidays	tancat per vacances	tan-kat puhr bah-kan-suhs
garden	el jardí	uhl zhahr-dee
museum	el museu	uhl moo-seh-oo
railway station	la estació de tren	luhs-tah-see-oh thuh tren
tourist information	l'oficina de turisme	loo-fee-see-nuh thuh too-reez-muh

Staying in a Hotel

Do you have any vacant rooms?	¿Tenen una habitació lliure?	teh-nuhn oo-nuh ah-bee-tuh-see oh lyuh-ruh
double room	habitació doble	ah-bee-tuh-see-oh doh-bluh
with double bed	amb lit de matrimoni	am lyet duh mah-tree moh-nee
twin room	habitació amb dos llits/amb llits individuals	ah-bee-tuh-see-oh am dohs lyeets/am lyeets in-thee-vee-thoo-ahls
single room	habitació individual	ah-bee-tuh-see-in-thee-vee-thoo-ahl
room with a bath/shower	habitació amb bany/dutxa	ah-bee-tuh-see-see-oh am bahnyou/doo-chuh
I have a reservation.	Tinc una habitació reservada.	Ting oo-nuh ah-bee-tuh-see-oh reh-sehr-vah-thah

Eating Out

Have you got a table for ...?
I'd like to reserve a table.

breakfast
lunch
dinner
The bill, please.
waiter/waitress

fixed price
menu
dish of the day

starters
main course
wine list

glass
bottle

knife

fork

spoon

coffee
rare
medium
well done

¿Tenen taula per ... ?
Voldria reservar una taula.

l'esmorzar el dinar el sopar El compte, si us plau. cambrer/cambrera

menú del día

el plat del día

els entrants el primer plat la carta de vins

un got una ampolla

un ganivet

una forquilla

una cullera

el café poc fet al punt molt fet

teh-nuhn
tow-luh puh
Vool-dree-uh
reh-sehr-vahr
oo-nuh tow-luh

les-moor-sah
uhl dee-nah
uhl soo-pah
uhl kohm-tuh
sees plah-oo
kam-breh/kam-breh-nuh

muh-noo thuhl
dee-uh
uhl plat duhl
dee-uh
uhlz ehn-tranz
uhl pree-meh plat
lah kahr-tuh
thuh veens

oon got
oo-nuh am-pol-yuh

oon gun-ee-veht

oo-nuh foor-keel-yuh

oo-nuh kool-yeh-ruh
ehl kah-feh
pok fet
ahl poon
mol fet

Menu Decoder

l'aigua mineral lah-ee-gwuh mee-nuh-rah
mineral water

sense gas/ amb gas sen-zuh gas/ am gas
still/ sparkling

l'all lahlyuh garlic

al forn ahl forn roasted

l'arròs lahr-roz rice

les botifarres lahs boo-tee-fah-rahs cured meats

la carn lah karn meat

la ceba lah seh-buh onion

la cervesa lah-sehr-ve-seh beer

el filet uhl fee-let sirloin

el formatge uhl for-mah-djuh cheese

l'embotit lum-boo-teet cold meat

fregit freh-zeet fried

la fruita lah froo-ee-tah fruit

els fruits secs uhlz froo-eets seks nuts

les gambes lahs gam-bus prawns

el gelat uhl djuh-lat ice-cream

la llagosta lah lyah-gos-tah lobster

la llet lah lyet milk

la llimona lah lyee-moh-nah lemon

la llimonada lah lyee-moh-nah-thuh lemonade

la mantega lah mahn-teh-gah butter

el marisc ulh mur-reesk seafood

la menestra lah muh-nehs-truh vegetable stew

el pa uhl pah bread

el pastís uhl pahs-tees pie/cake

las patates lahs pah-tah-tuhs potatoes

el peix pehs-kah-doh fish

la pebre pee-mee-yehn-tah pepper

el pernil uhl puh-nee cured ham

el plàtano uhl plah-tun banana

el pollastre uhl puu-lyah-struh chicken

la poma el porc les postres rostit la sal las salsitxas la salsa sec el sucre la taronja el te les torrades la vedella el vi blanc el vi negre el vi rosat el xai/el be la xocolata

lah poh-mah
uhl pohr
lahs pohs-truhs
rohs-teet
lah sahl
lahs sahl-see-chuhs
lah sahl-suh
sehk
uhl soo-kruh
lah tuh-rohn-djuh
uhl teh
lahs too-rah-thuhs
lah veh-theh-lyuh
uhl bee blang
uhl bee neh-greh
uhl bee roo-zaht
uhl shahee/uhl beh
lah shoo-koo-lah-tuh
apple
pork
desserts
roast
salt
sausages
sauce
dry
sugar
orange
tea
toast
beef
white wine
red wine
rosé wine
lamb
chocolate

Numbers

0	zero	zeh-roh
1	un/una	oon/oon-uh
2	dos/dues	dohs/doo-uhs
3	tres	trehs
4	quatro	kwa-truh
5	cinc	seeng
6	sis	sees
7	set	set
8	vuit	voo-eet
9	nou	noh-oo
10	deu	deh-oo
11	onze	on-zuh
12	dotze	doh-dzuh
13	tretze	treh-dzuh
14	catorze	kah-tohr-dzuh
15	quinze	keen-zuh
16	setze	set-zuh
17	disset	dee-set
18	divuit	dee-voo-eet
19	dinou	dee-noh-oo
20	vint	been
21	vint-i-un	been-tee-oon
30	trenta	tren-tah
40	quarenta	kwuh-ran-tuh
50	cinquanta	seen-kwahn-tah
60	seixanta	seh-ee-shan-tah
70	setanta	seh-tan-tah
80	viutanta	voo-ee-tan-tah
90	noranta	noh-ran-tah
100	cent	sen
101	cent un	sen oon
1000	mil	meel
1001	mil uno	meel oo-noh

The following words crop up frequently in maps and on street signs. You may encounter them in their Spanish or Valencian forms, depending on which part of the Costa Blanca you are visiting.

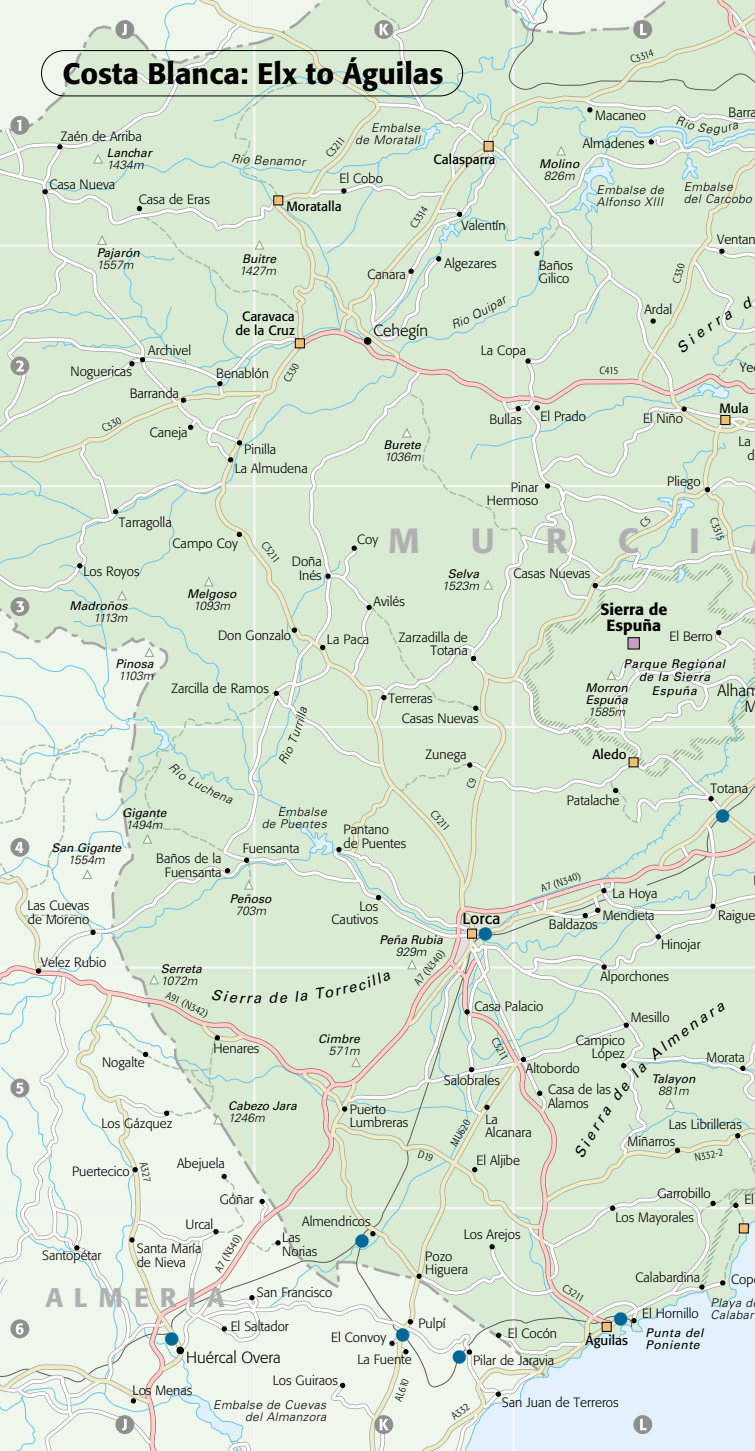
English	Spanish	Valencian
Avenue	Avenida	Avinguda
Beach	Playa	Platja
Cape	Cabo	Cap
Castle	Castillo	Castell
Market	Mercado	Mercat
Museum	Museo	Museu
Square	Plaza	Plaça
Street	Calle	Carrer
Town Hall	Ayuntamiento	Ajuntament

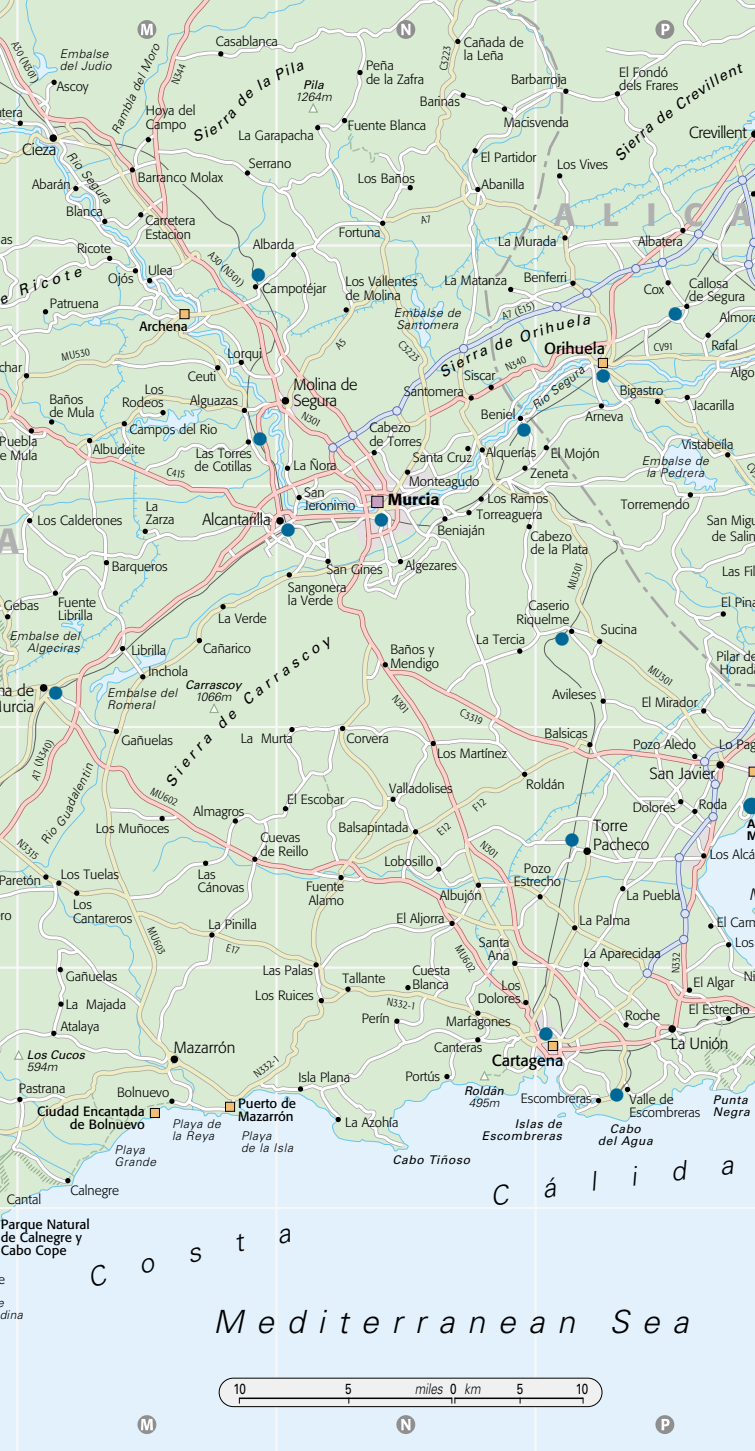
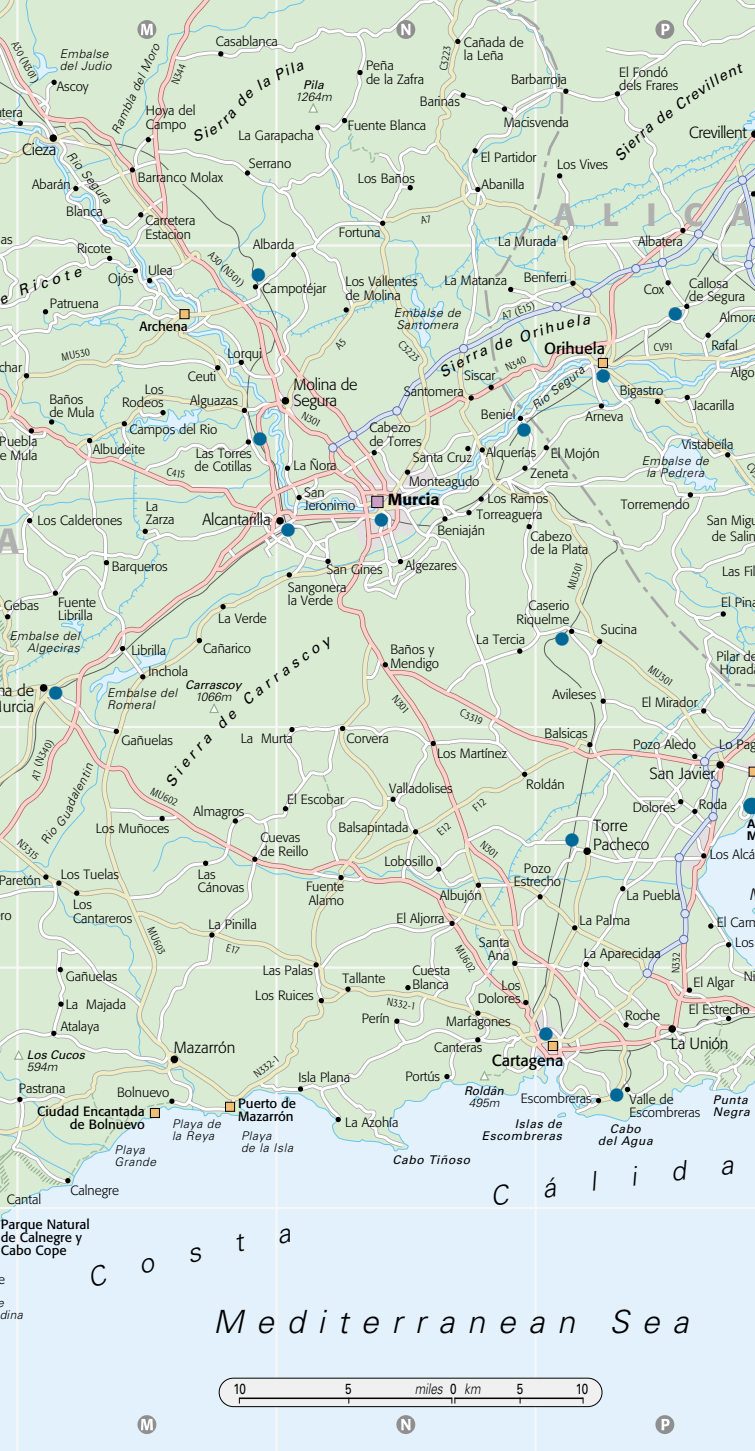


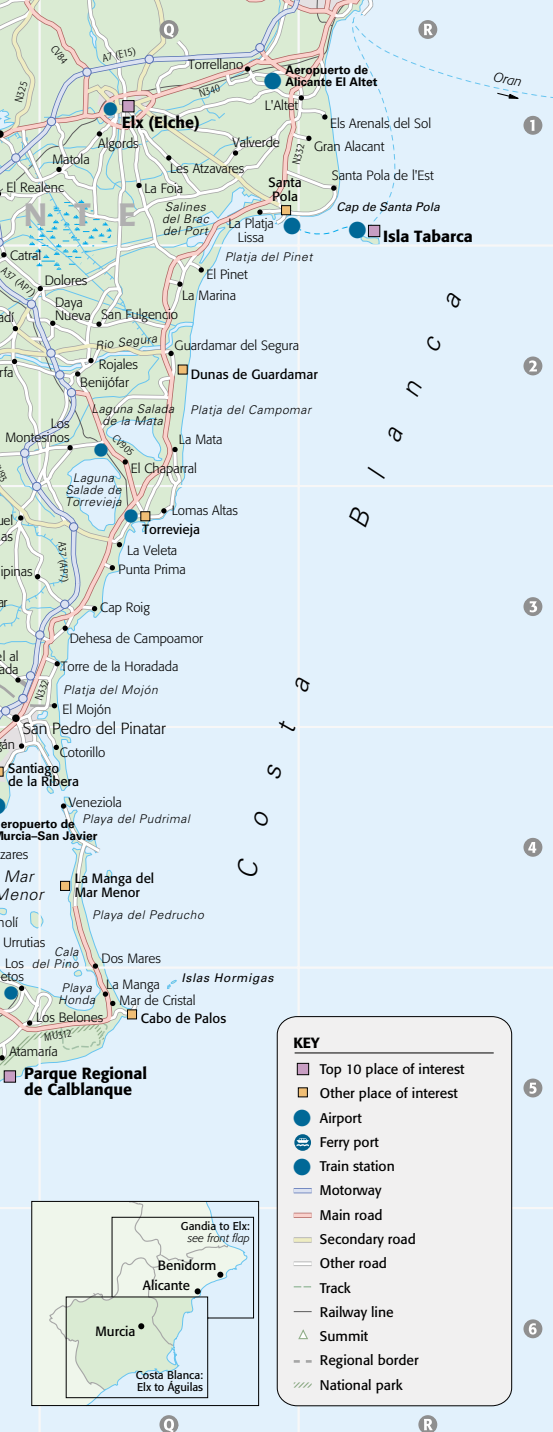
Costa Blanca: Selected Index of Places

Abanilla	N1	El Algar	P5	Morata	L5
Abdet	F3	El Berro	L3	Moratalla	K1
Agost	D5	El Campelló	E5	Mt Bernia	G3
Agres	E3	El Cantal	L5	Mt Montgó	H2
Águilas	L6	El Carmolí	P4	Mula	L2
Aiguës	F4	El Cocón	K6	Murcia	N3
Albatera	P1	El Estrecho	P5	Mutxamel	E5
Alcalá de la Jovada	F3	El Grau	F1	Novelda	D5
Alcantarilla	N3	El Hornillo	L6	Nucia	G4
Alcoi (Alcoy)	E3	El Mirador	P3	Oliva	G2
Aledo	L4	El Mojón	Q3	Ondara	G2
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Alguenya (Algueña)	C5	El Pinet	Q2	Orba	G3
Alhama de Murcia	M3	El Pinós (Pinoso)	C5	Orihuela	P2
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Almendricos	K6	Elda	D4	Parc Natural de la Font Roja	E3
Almoradí	P2	Els Arenals del Sol	R1	Parc Natural de Montgó	H2
Alquerías	N2	Elx (Elche)	Q1	Parcent	G3
Altea	G4	Escombreras	P5	Parque Natural de Calnegre	
Aqualandia	G4	Fanadix	G3	y Cabo Cope	L6
Archena	M2	Finestrat	F4	Pastrana	M5
Aspe	D5	Fortuna	N1	Pedreguer	G3
Atalaya	M5	Fuente Alamo	N4	Pego	G2
Atamaria	P5	Fuente de Cope	L6	Penáguila	F3
Ayora	C1	Gandia (Gandía)	F2	Penyal d'Iffac (Peñón d'Iffach)	G4
Bacarot	E5	Garrobbillo	L5	Perín	N5
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Baños y Mendigo	N3	Gran Alacant	R1	Pilar del al Horadada	P3
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Bellreguard	F2	Guardamar del Segura	Q2	Planes	F3
Bellús	E2	Hondón	C5	Playa Honda	Q5
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Beniel	N2	Islas Hormigas	Q5	Portús	N5
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Benijófar	Q2	La Azohía	N5	Puerto de Mazarrón	M5
Benimantell	F3	La Font d'en Carrós	F2	Puerto Lumbreras	K5
Benissa	G3	La Granadella	H3	Punta del Poniente	L6
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Bogairent	D3	La Manga del Mar Menor	Q4	Quatretondeta	F3
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Bouqueres	E5	La Paca	K3	Roda	P4
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(Cabo de la Nao)	H3	Lo Pagán	P4	Tarbená	G3
Cap de Sant Antoni	H2	L'Olla	G4	Terra Mítica	F4
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Castalla	D4	Los Belones	P5	Torre Pacheco	P4
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Cehégin	K2	Los Mayoriales	L6	Torreveja	Q3
Cieza	M1	Los Montesinos	Q2	Totana	L4
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Bolnuevo	M5	Los Ruices	N5	Val de Guadalest	F3
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Costa Blanca: Elx to Águilas







Alicante

KEY

- Top 10 sight
- Other sight
- Bus station
- Railway station
- Tourist information



Murcia





Alicante Street Index

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TOP 10

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